

MIOMANDRE

ORIENTALE

A decorative wavy line with three distinct, rounded, scallop-like shapes, rendered in a dark, textured material, possibly leather or a heavy cloth, against the orange background.

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L'AVENTURE DE
THERESE BEAUCHAMPS



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[L'AVENTURE DE THERESE BEAUCHAMPS]

by Francis de Miomandre

TRANSLATED BY RALPH ROEDER

ILLUSTRATED BY ALEXANDER CAÑEDO



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THE FIRST PART

I

By an Open Window

FOR two mortal hours Madame Beauchamps had been sitting beside the window, sedately embroidering anemones on her silk cloak. Tossing her work aside, she rose, yawning slightly.

"I am sick of it," she said, to herself rather than to the old lady who had been sitting beside her, for two hours also, silently, painting fans, in water-color.

Seven now lay on the table, drying. Such pretty flowers they bore too: the rosiest of roses, the lushest of lilacs, replicas of all the roses and lilacs painted on fans since Time began and old ladies learned to paint. In Life's hard battle Madame Larive fought with a fan. Every Monday morning she let fly a dozen at the frail head of a dealer in the *rue Vaugirard*. At five francs

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apiece they brought her an income which, with the pension she drew from the Republican Guard as the widow of one of its employees, insured her a quiet life and a window-seat to watch the struggles of others.

In passing be it said, Madame Larive never worked on Tuesdays or Thursdays. Punctually on Saturday afternoon at one-thirty she took up the brush and by seven the work was done.

On Saturday afternoons, time out of mind, Madame Beauchamps had visited her mother. She brought her sewing and the two women sat face to face, working silently.

Usually Madame Beauchamps waited for Madame Larive to finish her tenth fan before she asserted her existence: and it was at an angle of perplexity that Madame Larive raised her head.

"Sick of it? . . . of what? . . . of your sewing?"

"Of everything!" exclaimed the younger woman, with conviction.

By an Open Window

Madame Larive daintily deposited her brush — on a sheet of paper sacrificed for that purpose — and raised her head completely. She considered her daughter, for the first time in her life maybe, for there was something too startling not to defy recognition in those breath-taking words: “ I am sick of it.” She had said it in two beats, attenuating in so far the shock of those wild and lawless words, but — she had said it. Her daughter! . . . for undoubtedly she was her daughter . . . blond, dainty, pretty and modish: a neat little woman, insignificant as a whole, but charming in detail: a mouth delicately curled, a chin expressively moulded, and those blue eyes with spots of a deeper blue swimming in them. Undoubtedly this was her daughter, her little Thérèse, neutral and passive, whom she had brought up in the best principles (piano, sewing, respectability . . . “ Stand straight . . . use your fork . . . don’t look at men ”) and whom, thus launched on life, she had married

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to Monsieur Eugène Beauchamps, a professor, a widower and the father of a boy who went with the husband: a thoroughly correct, dependable, honest man, about whom, in other respects, Madame Larive knew nothing beyond a few very vague references.

Ten years had passed since then, and Madame Larive, widow and water-colorist, had retired into her indifference and a little flat in the *rue* Racine. After ten years of unruffled silence, her daughter's words struck her like a cyclone.

"Sick of everything? . . . Why, what . . . ? Aren't you happy? Have you quarreled with Eugène? "

Thérèse shrugged her shoulders.

"You can't quarrel with Eugène. I don't know what you mean by 'unhappy.' I am bored. I am sick of it all, sick of living in the *rue* Truffaut — it's not life."

"Why don't you move then? "

By an Open Window

“Eugène won’t. He was born in the Batignolles. He went to school there. He is married and settled and teaching there himself. . . . Oh, Mother, it is horrible: I can’t stand it any longer. It’s all very well for you: you see the Batignolles once a month; but to live your whole life there, never to get away, never . . . oh!”

“But the holidays.”

“Holidays! Playing cards two months a year in Nevers, with his family! Cards every evening, from eight till midnight! Mother, you wouldn’t stand it five minutes. — Besides, there are the other ten months. Don’t you see? Ten months — forty-four weeks — in a dark flat, on the ground floor, on an inner court! You have never seen it. You come over in the evening; everything is closed. It might be the Parc Monceau, for all you know. You see the lamp shades, they’re pretty, I know, I embroidered them: but the light under them — a prison lamp.”

“Why don’t you go out?”

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“ When? As soon as I clean up, and I won’t go out before, it’s time to start dinner. I’ve never known it to fail.”

“ Well, my dear, you can’t keep house and go out too: any woman will tell you that.”

“ And where? the Square des Batignolles? I’d rather read my cook-book. . . . Oh, you’re so lucky, living next door to the Luxembourg! ”

“ The Parc Monceau.”

Thérèse bridled.

“ The Parc Monceau? Never.”

“ It’s very pretty . . . ”

“ Much too pretty. We don’t belong. The people who go there have nothing to do. They can do as they please, go out, come home, go out again — think of it, Mother! No, the Parc Monceau is their park. I won’t go there. And the houses all around it . . . Why, just to go through the gates — those big gilded gates — makes me envious and disgusted. . . . Ten years on a ground floor in the *rue Truffaut*! ”

By an Open Window

Silence fell. Madame Larive was appalled. She had never thought of such things. Thérèse, her mild, colorless little girl, of whom she had made, by her diplomacy, a lady, the wife of a distinguished Professor (all Professors are distinguished) . . . such a great rise in the social scale . . . and everything, apparently, turning out for the best . . . and now, out of a clear sky, the little blond lady broaching boredom, almost revolt!

The old lady shifted her ground:

“My dear, I don’t know why you tell me these things. Have you spoken to your husband?”

“He wouldn’t understand. Inertia, insurmountable inertia. I know, I feel it: I shall end my life there.”

“Nonsense! You exaggerate. You don’t know how to make the best of things.”

Madame Larive took up her brush with a deprecating flourish and dibbled the heart of a rose.

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"Now, if I were you, Thérèse, I'd go calling and have a day at home. You will find it helps one over the hard places, and there are always hard places in married life. And I wouldn't mind what I couldn't mend: my maid, my husband, my step-son and his fool jokes; they are fool jokes, I know, but you must remember he is just a rude little schoolboy and he may make a good man; and above all I should laugh, my dear, I should laugh (and I'd have a right to, wouldn't I?) . . . at your grand little Chinaman."

"Monsieur Lung?" Thérèse smiled wanly, involuntarily.

"Monsieur Lung. Yes. Silly name! To think of you lodging a Chinaman, a Mandarin, as you might say. . . . My, my! Why, only yesterday, Madame Thuillier was saying: 'I do think it is so picturesque, your daughter lodging a Chinaman.' I am sure you must be the talk of the whole quarter."

"Dear me! he dresses like every one else. He

By an Open Window

never opens his mouth. He may be very entertaining for you, but for us . . . Oh, mother, if you could hear those conversations at night: Eugène and his tales out of school, Georges and his idiotic puns, and the imperturbable Monsieur Lung, sitting there and drinking it all in! I wonder what he thinks of it? He came to Paris to study European life and he landed in the *rue Truffaut*! Well, I suppose he knows where to go during the day, anyway. . . .”

And her mind running on the life of her exotic guest, Thérèse felt, despite everything, a touch of something fantastic and incongruous gilding her own. To be sure, nothing was more natural than the presence of Monsieur Lung in her household. He had been sent to Paris by his family for his studies and to acquaint himself with European customs. He had had to live somewhere, and an agency had put him in touch with a modest school-teacher, who had a room to let and who offered table board with it. The

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circumstances were natural, but the fact itself remained remarkable and incongruous: Monsieur and Madame Beauchamps, *bourgeois* of the Batignolles, sharing their life with a Chinaman with a man who had come from the ends of the earth. Involuntarily, they imagined him in sumptuous robes, on tall wooden clogs, with drooping mustaches, and a long black pigtail tapping his back.

The tension of her daughter's tone had relaxed a little, and Madame Larive said:

"Thérèse, you don't know what you want to do you? Of course not: you are bored. But make me I tell you what I think?"

"Well?"

"I think, you dress too well. Now don't shrug your shoulders, and *don't* pout — remember how you used to pucker your mouth — the left corner — when you were a little girl? Yes, my dear, you are too smart — too smart for your station in life. With those clothes you should drive, and

By an Open Window

you walk; you should be dining in a smart cabaret, and you serve soup at home to a school-teacher, a schoolboy and a Celestial. Don't misunderstand me, my dear: I am very proud of my smart little daughter, but if it is going to make her unhappy . . ."

Thérèse rolled up her sewing, slipped it into her reticule, and replied, drily:

"What else can I do — if I don't dress?"

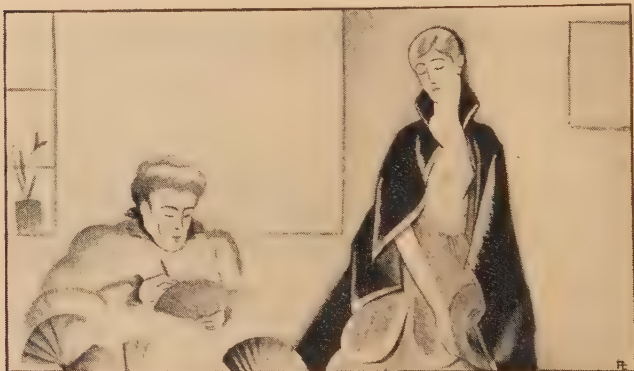
"Dressing," replied Madame Larive sententiously, "is only effective for a purpose. You must dress for someone or something. Now, *I* should dress for Monsieur Lung, if I were you. It must be odd, a Chinaman . . ."

A little gleam of mischief rode in her water-colored eyes. In her day, while her Republican Guard of a husband was still alive, she had tripped venially with a gentleman or two, and the experience had left her with a wise and indulgent view of life. Once, in fact, the gentleman had been an Austrian on his mother's side. But she

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had never strayed farther than the Danube. A Chinaman! Lucky little Thérèse!

But Madame Beauchamps did not relish such humor.



“Mother! How can you? Monsieur Lung!”

And she added, peroratorically:

“*Really*, you have not understood one word of what I was saying. Good-bye.”

Madame Larive recognized the official nervous formula of all feminine irritations and was completely reassured; and making a rapid mental calculation to the effect that she had just time to

By an Open Window

finish her twelve fans, she replied, as she kissed Madame Beauchamps:

"I shall not detain you. Good-bye, child. I know what a house is. Now don't go eating your heart out, life isn't worth it. By the way, the new bus line is running. It's much handier."

Thérèse poised a flimsy monument of flowers and *paille de riz* on her head, shouldered an exquisite mantle of taffeta, and fled.

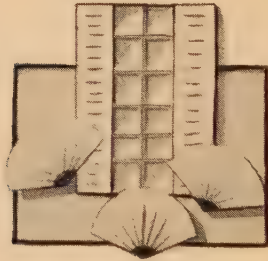
But to sit, in so dainty a gown, in the sweltering compartment of a public bus, between a stout unkempt gentleman on one side and a sprawling workingwoman on the other, was more than she could bear on this particular evening.

Fuming, and mumbling many an unflattering animadversion on the gracelessness of humanity, she alighted at the first stop, hailed a taxi and settled herself recklessly in its depths.

Oh, the joy of it! The balmy September air: the rolling cab: the passers-by, the houses, the

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yellowing trees, slipping by as in a dream! For ten minutes she was a rich woman in her own car. The glamor was golden and brief. She had at last to alight, to pay her fare, and to face once more the odious realities of life.



II

Home, Sweet Home

FOR waifs, strays and outcasts, and for them only — for all those who have never known “the sweetness of a home” or who have forfeited it — a calm middle-class home is a thing of joy, a text for regret, the image of a pleasant life.

Because they see it through the magical lens of a window, that devilish lens of the window, which reveals only the roseate glow of the lamp and hides the banalities it lights! Those who have made that home and live in it see it in no such alluring light. Madame Beauchamps, for one, did not. Her home was the lair of the meanest and most unforeseen calamities always lurking to greet her homecoming, the one place in the world from which peace and repose were forever banished, a perpetual hotbed of trouble, a sort of

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hither Purgatory, devil-portered by Lise, the maid of all work, a hot-tempered and untutored Provençale, perpetually in a pet for the sun of her native province. From time immemorial she had answered the door with bad tidings, and this evening was no exception.

“Madame! Why, it’s Madame!” she shrilled. “At last! Monsieur is in the dining-room . . . reading his paper for three quarters of an hour. The man from the Galeries Lafayette was here, he wouldn’t leave the parcel. The meat’s burned, of course. . . . Madame wasn’t here. . . . Some one has to be responsible: the house won’t run itself.”

In this tirade lay matter for four distinct arguments, exclusive of such new vistas as retort might provide. For the present, however, Madame Beauchamps preferred to attack none of them. She went straight to her room, removed her hat, her cloak and her waist, slipped on a wrapper (much too handsome for this *rez-de-*

Home, Sweet Home

chaussée) and joined her husband in the dining-room. Again, yet once again, she faced him: that vague and colorless nobody, placid, glum, greying, pot-bellied, platitudinous, with whom she had been living ten years and whom she had never considered attentively. He glanced up from his paper.

"You are late. The table is laid," he said: but gently, with no more deplorable purpose than to say something.

"Yes, I am late. Mother detained me. But the young man is not home, either."

Monsieur Beauchamps quivered. . . . *The young man!* Of the three expressions his wife employed to designate the offspring of his first union, this one was the most offensive, the most seismographic. *Georges* meant, "Fair and cool. I don't care." *Your son* was a warning — more or less muffled and subcutaneous — to respect the boundaries between the Beauchamps and Larive sides of the scutcheon; but *the young man* signi-

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fied, "We have nothing in common. If you know what is good for you, you will leave me alone."

Before Monsieur Beauchamps could reply, however, the young man appeared, like a jack-in-the-box, in the likeness of a tall, sallow, vicious-looking youth with slick, sparse, brownish hair, furtive eyes, and a broad twisted mouth, twitching with nervous itches.

"The young man," he drawled, in his nasty suburban accent, "the young man came in behind you. And he was on foot, while you were in an auto. Pretty swell! "

Madame Beauchamps paled slightly.

"An auto!" exclaimed Monsieur Beauchamps, aghast.

"No, pater, no! Just joking. My little joke."

And he slipped his step-mother an indefinable look. She returned it tartly.

"Your jokes are not very bright," said his father draconically.

Home, Sweet Home

Meanwhile Lise, with arms akimbo, marched up to the table.

“Madame, shall I serve? I’m ready. Suppose I must go call the Chinaman?”

“Of course, my girl, of course. What are you waiting for?”

Subtly, Georges imitated a little whistle and added:

“How’s that for style? Lise has style, all right, all right, but Mother Beauchamps has more.”

In thought — but only in thought, alas! — Thérèse slapped the brat. The blood rushed to her colorless face. Her head swam, in a cruel and ideal vertigo. Ceremonious and mute, Monsieur Lung entered, bowed three times, and took his seat, with deprecating modesty, on Madame Beauchamps’ right. He was small and very correctly dressed in a blue sack suit of faultless cut. The flat nose, the cramped eyes, the citron skin, the sleek shaven face made up the typical face

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of the Chinaman abroad. Only the practised eye distinguishes individual variations in the physiognomy of a race: the rest of us see only the type. Especially was this so in the case of the Beauchamps, who were not keen observers. In their eyes Monsieur Lung was their preposterous — and ever-punctual — lodger. Never for a moment did it occur to them that he could *see* them or form an opinion of them himself. Everything seemed so indifferent to him, anyway: for weeks at a time he would not open his mouth, communicating with them only by an occasional bow or an intangible, friendly smile. When he was obliged to break his silence, he did so in a correct, though deliberate French, more choice certainly than the jargon affected by Monsieur Georges, that pure flower of the Batignolles cabbage-patches.

Madame Beauchamps' opinion of him was complex: she did not think of him as a man, yet she suffered keenly when her husband and

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Georges were guilty of vulgarity in his presence. And they shared none of her scruples: Georges least of all.

On this evening the meal was particularly trying.

The soup was scorched, and Monsieur Beauchamps improved the occasion to observe that "at that, he preferred it to swallows' nests": an unfailing remark, devoid of all malice, introduced only to convince Monsieur Lung that even a Frenchman must take an intelligent interest in the domestic practices of his guest's native land. Monsieur Lung never blenched.

As for the meat, it corresponded to — and surpassed — the description Lise had so despondently drawn of it. It resembled a superb nugget of coal.

Georges, with ever-ready wit, called for an axe for his slice. And Monsieur Beauchamps intimated that maybe . . . if his wife had chosen to see to it . . .

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She said nothing. She felt that if she opened her lips, she would be swept away in a torrent of rage and recrimination. She resorted to indirection.

“ I hope, Monsieur Lung, that you will forgive these little domestic scenes. They are absurd. But you see, what can I do? ”

To which Monsieur Lung replied by pensively wagging his head, intimating how far from his lowly power of appreciation were the personal affairs of the esteemed hosts, at whose table he was privileged to sit.

“ Monsieur comes from Peking,” observed Georges, with his exasperating accent. “ If you ask him to peek in on our rows, Monsieur will merely remark, politely, ‘ Tut, Madame ’; but for all that only the sword of his ancestors, if he had brought it, could master this mutinous mut-ton. Only he won’t say so. He will sooner seek solace in hari-kari, which is a more dignified form of suicide than suet-side.”

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"Your puns are preposterous," declared Monsieur Beauchamps. "And how many times must I tell you that the inhuman habit to which you allude is Japanese and not Chinese?"



"All the same," pursued the obnoxious wag relentlessly, "Mother Beauchamps might have spared me this tiff with my pater, if not for the auto."

"The auto! The auto? What do you mean?" snapped Monsieur Beauchamps apprehensively.

"Just a joke, pater, just a teeny weeny little . . ."

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"Oh, well," cried Thérèse, exasperated, "I took a taxi to come home from Mother's. The bus got on my nerves. Everything got on my nerves to-day. . . ."

"But, my dear," said Monsieur Beauchamps, "I am not reproaching you. You may take a conveyance, if you please, though our budget, as you realize, hardly admits of extravagance. . . . I am merely surprised that you concealed it just now."

"Concealed it! I? Oh, really, now!"

"When Georges spoke of . . . it . . . you said nothing. . . ."

"But he dropped it himself. He said it was silly."

"Pardon me, pardon me, parent," purred the youth. "Joking I said, I was only joking. I said it, I say it."

"Your idea of a joke is painful, my boy, and extremely indelicate. . . . You wanted your father to think that I hide things from him . . .

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that I take taxis. . . . I don't think I need your permission. . . .”

“Oh, if that's how you take it, I'd better shut up. A joke's a joke, and I don't have much fun. If you don't like it, all right: I'll shut my trap.”

“You are hard on the poor boy,” concluded Monsieur Beauchamps. “He is a little lacking in tact, at times, I admit, but what the deuce! you must do your bit too, Thérèse. I hardly expected, when I married you, that you would . . . Well, it's life, I suppose. But your heart is in the right place, both of you. Now then, come, kiss and make up. Georges, kiss your mother.”

Thérèse was outraged. All the petty indignities of her married life were being paraded before a stranger.

“No,” she said, “No. This is hardly the time for such demonstrations. You forget Monsieur Lung.”

“He will understand. . . .”

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"Don't insist. I won't. Don't make things worse. I have had enough to put up with to-day."

"To-day? Why? Is anything the matter? I don't . . ."

"Oh, please, please! Stop it. Suppose we eat, instead of talking. For Monsieur Lung's sake, at least, if not for mine. He is not interested in all this."

There was a silence, a long, interminable, crushing silence. Each one was meditating . . . things, things . . . which it would have needed hours to express, allowing for the objections of the adversary. . . . It was easier to say nothing. But the atmosphere was intolerable: someone had to break it.

This delicate responsibility the Chinaman undertook. He seemed to sense the critical moment at which Georges would succumb to another calamitous break and dispelled the disaster.

"Madame," he said, with his quaint accent,

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and very deliberately, as if he were picking his words one by one, "Madame, may I ask you a favor? "

Madame Beauchamps turned to him with a sigh of relief. Here, at least, was someone who could speak to her without wounding her.

"Certainly, Monsieur Lung," she replied. "I shall be delighted."

"A friend of mine . . . a very dear friend . . . a Chinaman . . . has just arrived from China . . . I should like to introduce him to you."

"As a lodger?" Monsieur Beauchamps inquired.

"Oh, no. He will stay at the hotel. But he knows no one here. He would consider it a privilege to make your acquaintance."

"We shall be charmed. . . ."

"He is perfectly . . . proper. He is a banker in Canton."

"I suppose he is very rich then. . . . Chinese

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bankers, they say, are fabulously rich. How much would you say he has? ”

“ I don’t know. I haven’t any idea, really . . . ”

“ Give a guess,” prompted Georges. “ A million? two million? ”

“ Oh, more than that,” said Monsieur Lung, smiling.

“ Phew! How much more? Three? Four? Six? ”

“ The currency is so different, it is impossible to compare it, you know. . . . But he has over six millions, certainly.”

The Beauchamps foundered in amazement and Lise cleared the table with bated breath. Georges persisted:

“ Ten? Twenty? ”

“ His fortune is by no means one of the largest in Canton, his firm, in fact, is a small one; but I should say that he has something like fifty millions. . . . He wants a rest from business and

Home, Sweet Home

he has come to France because ” — and Monsieur Lung inclined his head — “ it is the most charming country in Europe. A very respectable man, I assure you.”

He turned, ceremoniously, toward Madame Beauchamps.

“ May I bring him to-morrow, Madame? ”

“ Of course, Monsieur Lung, of course,” murmured Thérèse, a little vaguely.

Fifty millions! What power did that represent? A millionaire fifty times over had asked for an introduction to the Beauchamps of the Batignolles! It was ridiculous — but true. Monsieur Lung never jested, he never laughed. Now he was saying, with his meticulous and imperturbable smile:

“ Thank you, Madame. I am touched. If you have no objection, I shall dine in town to-morrow evening and bring him about nine. . . . By the way, his name is Monsieur Tchéou.”

But no one heard him. Something extraordi-

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nary was in the air. . . . And the Chinaman was smiling, smiling . . . as if nothing had happened!

Fifty millions!

Lise computed them by breaking two cups.



III

Clearing

ALL the next day the Beauchamps could think of nothing but the Chinese banker. The feeble imagination of the Professor and the foolish one of his son labored unremittingly on this new factor in the problem of their life. But Thérèse was more upset than either of them. She could not have said how or why. A chaos of images was dancing in her narrow brain: their constant association and disassociation made her head ache. Her inner world was like a swamp seething above a deep bed of slime with the aimless life of a thousand strange and shapeless creatures. A stone had fallen into it, completing its confusion: a stone, or rather an ingot of bullion. It lay in the depths, in the core of her mind, glowing, infernal, absurd, related to nothing, incomprehensible.

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Fifty millions! What relation could there be between fifty millions and a life in which two francs for a cab were an extravagance? Thérèse had a bird's-eye view of her life: it was not life at all, it was an accumulation of mean little worries, of inadmissible privations, of petty annoyances, of bills, disputes, and microscopic calculations, an idiotic succession of drab, identical days with, as a goal for each, the inevitable grotesque spectre of Lise brandishing her expense account, a greasy anthology of the most shameless fabrications on the price of butter, carrots, coal, chicken, and fruit. Every item had to be discussed, corrected, rejected, despite the tacit understanding on either side that the attack, lost to-day, would be renewed to-morrow . . . and won!

Yet there were in the world people who knew nothing of such vulgar cares, who went to bed when they would, who travelled where they pleased, who had raised between themselves and

Clearing

their needs a whole little world of salaried subalterns, who could exploit them unawares. . . . To-morrow she would lay eyes on one of those superior souls, those privileged beings . . . she would receive him, on a footing of equality, in her own home!

Really, it was a remarkable coincidence. It had befallen on a day when she had particularly suffered from her poverty, when her middle-class life had been bitter even unto death, when her mother's failure to understand and the fierce and ridiculous hostility of her ninny of a step-son, when all things in fact had seemed, silently but distinctly, to cry: "See, see how ugly, how atrocious, how cruel it is not to have money, to have to account for everything one does"; it was on that very evening that Destiny had announced the advent of a man fabulously rich, a kind of fiscal potentate.

For one little moment, flying in the face of all probability, she saw herself in splendor, arrayed

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in silk and gold, alighting from a palanquin, borne by deferential and bedizened retainers, and she caught the gilded gleam of her tapering nails. Then the vision vanished, lost in a sort of diffused, abstract radiance. Fifty millions!

She took a piece of paper and tried to figure it out. The Beauchamps had six thousand francs a year to live on. It would have taken her husband eight thousand years to amass such a fortune. She halted, aghast. It was like measuring inter-stellar space, the time that the light of a remote extinct star takes to reach our planet. It surpassed understanding . . . it could not be grasped. . . .

Fifty million! What did that amount to in annual income? That would bring it closer. . . . About three millions a year. . . . And per day, per day? . . . What! . . . No! . . . Eight thousand two hundred and nineteen francs. . . . This was worse than before. That alien could spend in one day, without regret, without

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touching his capital, two thousand francs more than the Beauchamps in an entire year!

Gradually the physical entity of that prodigious being waned in her imagination, lost in an incoherent maze of figures. For a moment or so she had a kind of vision of society, in which some few men like this Chinaman govern the world of the poor, the humble, the semi-proletarian. Then everything faded in the confusion of an immense discouragement. She tore her paper into tiny bits and threw them into the waste-basket.

What to do?

To that question responded, active, exact, determined, the housewife in her; she must put her house in order, to honor her guest. And she spent the day in preparations.

Lise, overworked, panic-stricken but obedient, already cowed and sharing her mistress's feelings, went and came, cleaning, dusting and setting everything to rights. After six hours'

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work the apartment wore that shining, refreshed air which is perhaps the only charm of a middle-class home.

Exhausted, Madame Beauchamps turned to her toilette. To its minute and complicated elaboration she dedicated two good hours. Then, nervous, trembling, unoccupied, no longer daring to touch anything, she sat on the edge of a chair and waited. She was wearing a beautiful gown of violet silk, with bands of a darker violet bridling it loosely. Her eyes were a little sunken, shadowy with fatigue, and their blue was the brighter. Her blond hair harmonized delicately with the rosy tint of the lamps which warmed the rooms and gave a suggestion of elegance to the banal furniture and the commonplace ornaments. . . . What work it meant, to obtain even this much, this semblance of leisure and luxury! A day of cleaning and care for a moment of ease. And to-morrow, she would have to begin all over again. The banker would come and take it

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all for granted and go on his way again. Really, what was the use of it? Strangers are a bore!

Dinner was quickly dispatched. The Beauchamps, senior and junior, trim as the house, were well aware how fatal to the composure of kempt clothes was a meal too comfortably enjoyed. Besides, the excitement of soon laying eyes on the nabob quickened all their movements. When they rose from table, there were still three quarters of an hour to wait. Their guests were discreet and would not appear a minute before nine.

At last they arrived.

"Madame Beauchamps," said Monsieur Lung, "allow me to present Monsieur Tchéou. My friend is at a loss to tell you how honored he feels that you should be willing to receive him."

Thereupon a man of about the same height and corpulence as Monsieur Lung (though a trifle taller) advanced with a deep bow. He was dressed in European clothes of the most approved

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cut. His person had an air of immaculate care and refinement. To such superficial observers as the Beauchamps the newcomer was in no wise different from his forerunner, for they saw in him no more than his race. But though, from behind, Monsieur Tchéou was a true copy of Monsieur Lung, he differed from him somewhat in features: his face, in the first place, was hardly yellow at all: rather was it flushed and ruddy like that of an Occidental in anger. It was also a little rounder, and it was suffused and transfigured by an infinite, an exquisite kindness. Not a hint of slyness in this Far Eastern face, in this man of millions: quite the reverse. Never, on any face, had Thérèse seen such gentle ingenuousness, placid and all but helpless.

Something happened in her, something strange, new, mad, delirious. She could not account for it. It tallied with none of the ready-made phrases we so stubbornly apply to our feelings. Besides, words mattered nothing. A world of deep feel-

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ings there is in us, which they never penetrate, where consciousness itself hardly makes bold to intrude. Thérèse had just glimpsed its depths.

This foreigner seemed to answer all the unformulated queries of her defeats, her resentments, the secret desires of her womanhood: he seemed to efface, with a smile, all the dull encumbering phantoms of her days. Not for a moment did she think either of his wealth as an unworthy lure, or of his race — so remote! — as an obstacle, or of anything. She did not think at all. Nervously exhausted, taxed as by a vigil overprolonged, she drifted in a delicious drowsiness, she let herself go. Vaguely, to be sure, she felt how inconsonant with her practical obligations was that yielding, but she knew that she could not help it, and she left to some indeterminate superior Wisdom the care of her safety, the care of everything. . . .

A few seconds, the length of a look, had re-

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vealed in the face of the stranger, silent and ceremonious, a sudden, profound, answering trouble. No one else could have caught it, so brief it was, and so mysterious. But she was absolutely sure. The stranger felt for her what she felt for him, with even more submission, with even more force. They recovered themselves at once but the secret between them was sealed. Thérèse was in possession of an enviable certainty, of that supreme joy for a woman of knowing her power supreme over a man's feeling.

The little scene had elapsed in less time than lies between a question and an answer. It was concluded when Monsieur Beauchamps, in his most urbane manner, answered his lodger:

"We are delighted to meet Monsieur Tchéou. He is your friend: he needs no other recommendation."

"You must pardon him," continued Monsieur Lung," he speaks no French. He arrived only yesterday. But he will learn very quickly,

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in deference to you. At present he can only say 'Yes' and 'No.' ”

“It is a beginning,” said Monsieur Beauchamps, with a protective emphasis.

“Right!” volunteered the young hopeful. “If I went to China, I couldn’t do as much myself.”

Monsieur Beauchamps drew up the chairs in a semi-circle about the cold hearth and invited the company to be seated, as if this act constituted, in the eyes of the stranger, the supreme rite of Occidental hospitality and a synthetic symbol, as it were, of our manners and customs.

Whereupon everyone relapsed into silence, Monsieur Tchéou because he commanded no French, Monsieur Lung through discretion (he was waiting for his hosts to begin), Thérèse the better to imbibe her new sensations, Monsieur Beauchamps because of the barrenness of his invention, and Georges because he was cogitating some shining sally, something that should be at once novel, unhackneyed and caustic.

Orientale

"Ahem!" he ventured, at last. "So you are a canker in Banton . . . beg pardon, my error . . . a banker in Canton?"

"Georges!" cried Monsieur Beauchamps, vexed. "I'll thank you to hold your tongue."

"But, pater, I'm only trying to talk. Oh, well! Have it your way! I know I'm not appreciated here."

The strangers smiled, imperturbably, for all the world as if a pair of reputable poets had deigned to exchange, in their unworthy presence, a spray of choice cogitations. Silence settled again. Luckily, tea was served.

Thérèse gracefully offered the first unsugared cup to her guest. She had been to great pains to have it light and perfumed, like a faint brew of flowers. Monsieur Lung, in Chinese, drew his friend's attention to its aroma, and the latter smiled yet more benignly and bowed to his hostess. Then he addressed Monsieur Lung, who interpreted:

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"He says, Madame, that he is extremely touched and that when he was in England four years ago, they served him very strong tea. He feels as if he were at home here. He is extremely pleased."

And, in truth, Monsieur Tchéou was delighted. He sipped his light tea gratefully. Placid and smiling, Thérèse watched him drink and never dreamed of speaking.

"But, my dear," remarked Monsieur Beauchamps, "you seem to be forgetting your duties as a hostess. You have not said a word yet to our guest."

"Do you really think it necessary?" she replied.

"It would be more courteous."

Then Thérèse turned deliberately toward her savior and asked him:

"Monsieur Tchéou, are you glad you came to Paris?"

Monsieur Tchéou quivered, as he heard him-

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self addressed directly. His friend immediately translated her question, and it was with a beautiful, child-like joy that he himself replied, with a broad smile, and nodding his head:

“ Yes.”

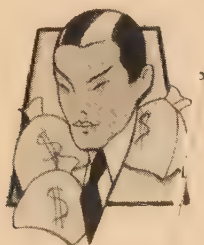
He repeated it three times. More than that he dared not say: it was avowal enough. And Thérèse so understood it. And since, after that, the conversation could develop no further for her, she let it drop.

It dragged deplorably. Georges' joke-stoking failed to revive it. As for Monsieur Beauchamps, his professional verbosity failed him: he was lost in amazement at his visitor's simplicity. He had conceived him as corresponding in some way to his immense fortune, and he was merely a well-bred punctilious little man, a kind of decent *rentier*. He concluded (and his opinion was shared by his son and even by the servant) that Monsieur Lung had lied, deeming it necessary to present his friend in the most flattering light.

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And at once the whole thing, stripped of its exoticism, ceased to interest him.

As for Thérèse, absent-minded, indifferent, communing with her surroundings only by a vague conventional smile, she was wrapt, for the first time in her life, into those ideal regions where everything is light, superhuman, and emancipated from the restrictions of time and space, where the soul knows nothing but its own rapturous ripeness for joy.



IV

Courtship

A WEEK passed before Monsieur Tchéou reappeared. He meant to address Madame Beauchamps directly, the next time he met her. So he shut himself up in his hotel room and studied, studied indefatigably. Like all his countrymen, he was abundantly gifted. In a week he had assembled a certain number of phrases, sufficient, he thought, to allow him to contribute to a conversation, without recourse to the interpreter. Unfortunately, however, when he ventured a second visit, at the end of the week, in the same circumstances as the first, his confusion upon seeing Thérèse again, and the embarrassment produced by the presence and the conversation of the other Beauchamps prevented his employing his budding knowledge. He could do no more

Courtship

than smile and drink his light tea delightedly, and it was only with a great effort and many a tremor that he found the courage to say to her:

“ I am very happy, Madame, yes, very happy.”

It was enough, however, for Thérèse. She was entering on that blessed period in which neither events nor words even are necessary, in which the joy of being loved requires no proof.

She knew that Monsieur Tchéou had thought of her, that he had been making an effort to approach her. She saw his confusion. She would have liked to say to him: “ I know, I know. I see through you. I see myself in you.” But she merely smiled, offered him tea, and asked what he was doing. He too felt that this was the acme of happiness, a kind of dream. He would never forget that his arrival in France had been blessed by this miraculous smile of Destiny. If it is true that love needs, for its perfection, the charm of mystery and strangeness, it was perfect love, past question, that Monsieur Tchéou now felt. He

Orientale

loved a Frenchwoman, a delicate little blond lady with blue eyes, a creature diametrically his opposite, altogether foreign to him. He had been separated from her till this day by all the vastity of the globe, but that enormous distance was nothing compared to the moral and infinite one which had been produced between them by ages of differing civilisations, manners, religions, thoughts, dress and language. And yet how little all that weighed against so simple and irresistible a sentiment, which abolished all distances, cancelled all contrasts, mocked at all obstacles. On the contrary, it seemed to lend it greater power, and Monsieur Tchéou would have been incapable of loving a compatriot as he now loved Madame Beauchamps, the modest *bourgeoise* of the Bati-
gnolles, in whose person was embodied for him all the charm of Paris.

It was enough for him to know that she existed. He had no desire to go anywhere, though he had come to Paris for pleasure and to recover

Courtship

from the strain of his business in Canton. He cared now for nothing. He was learning French to address Thérèse. Often, as he sat alone in his room, he would think, in Chinese, the most charming poetic thoughts . . . and translate them, at once, as best he could, into faltering and touching phrases, into pigeon-footed flights. . . .

But his native shrewdness stood him in good stead, for all the ingenuousness of his passion. His third call he paid alone, and in the afternoon, as Thérèse was going out. . . . An extraordinary confusion weighed on them both, and a tremulous joy. Thérèse sat down, rose, offered him her hand. . . . In an irresistible impulse Monsieur Tchéou conducted it to his heart and said, with a beautiful poetic smile:

“Even and easy is the way that leads to your dwelling.”

Then he blushed, the while Thérèse colored as neatly. Excessively embarrassed, he floundered

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for some more European amenity and failed to find it.

Then Thérèse proposed tea, which he declined courteously:

“ You are too charming . . . too well dressed . . . to serve . . . the tea-cups. . . . Will you allow me to take you . . . to tea . . . in town? ”

Thérèse all but clapped her hands. No one had ever offered her tea in town, no one had ever offered her anything. And here was her swain, her “ beautiful Mandarin,” as she called him already, suggesting . . .

“ Your husband . . . won’t mind? ” said the scrupulous Monsieur Tchéou. “ In France . . . it is permitted? ”

“ He will be flattered,” she replied, boldly. “ I should love to. . . . I was just going out, you see, but only for a stroll, only . . . to the Champs-Élysées.”

She was lying. She had been bound for her

Courtship

mother's but, with Monsieur Tchéou, dignity demanded the Champs-Élysées.

That impressive word produced the desired effect. Monsieur Tchéou smiled with a sort of respect, then his face beamed:

"Shall we take tea . . . at the Palace? . . . I am staying there. . . ."

Madame Beauchamps blinked. Monsieur Tchéou lived at the Palace, like a Hindu prince, like a Persian Shah! . . .

Suddenly she remembered his immense fortune, which she had forgotten since their first meeting, and a new sense of pride inflamed her feeling for him.

Monsieur Tchéou seemed to divine how subtly her vanity was involved in her emotion, and he flattered it in a thousand ways, ever so delicately. He was all attention, he embroidered the little truancy with charming and respectful details. . . . At the cab-stand he chose the largest and most comfortable taxi, and filled the flower-

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holder with carnations bought on the curb. The cab rolled along, twice as welcome as the one Thérèse had taken the night her husband and her step-son had made her rue it so bitterly. . . . Ah! No one could begrudge her this one!

Monsieur Tchéou, seated on her left, hardly dared look at her, but he watched her every movement in the glass. He was afraid to speak now, lest his poor little skill fail him. Besides, he had nothing to say, nothing but tender and lyrical reminiscences of his national poets, and those he dared not . . . yet . . . Madame Beauchamps imbibed his mute, constant homage, silently. She too had nothing to say. Her grave and superior instinct as a woman prevailed over the mediocre, superficial nature of the *bourgeoise*, and, in obeying it, she attained to a kind of nobility.

As they drew up before the hotel, she took the flowers from their vial.

Courtship

“ I shall take them. They would die here, without water.”

And she pinned them to her dress. Monsieur Tchéou murmured, respectfully:

“ They are pleased! ”

Thérèse seemed not to hear, and they entered the lobby together.

It seemed as if the whole world must know what a power this Monsieur Tchéou was, how magnificent a personage, and she was proud to be seen with him in these glittering purlieus. The type of luxury she saw there corresponded admirably to her own appearance, which was undeniably attractive, though lacking in the simplicity of genuine style. Such as she was, however, Madame Beauchamps made her mark: she was noticed, and not only on account of her escort; and she knew the delight of gratified pride. Here, at last, was the fitting setting for her hitherto neglected gifts. For the second time, she remembered Monsieur Tchéou's fortune, to which she

Orientale

owed these new pleasures. And her love was doubled by gratitude.

They took a table near the gypsy-orchestra, and Thérèse lost not a note of those waltzes she knew so well on the hurdy-gurdies that ground them out in her courtyard at home. Their painted airs were rejuvenated: they were new and nervous and buoyant, transformed by the magic bows that stroked the strings.

She herself was like one of those waltzes, she thought. Poor, faded, graceless, incomplete, at home, in the dark stone well; pretty, excited, vibrant here, in this glittering bell of glass and light.

How could she help loving him? This man who had come from the ends of the earth just, as it seemed, to offer her this transformation, to give her that two-fold illusion so necessary to women: love and wealth!

Thérèse was like all women: she had no doubts

Courtship

of herself or her power. However miraculous it might seem, it was perfectly natural that a man should choose her as the dream of his life, and she was ready to claim, in her own right, the most radiant future.



“It is beautiful here,” said Monsieur Tchéou.
“I like it.”

“So do I,” replied Thérèse. “It is so pleasant to sit without thinking and listen to the music. . . .”

“You don’t know how happy I am in Paris,” he continued. “Paris is splendid. . . . I never

Orientale

dreamed . . . such a beautiful surprise. . . .
The ladies . . . are so smart."

"Yes, in a place like this. . . . Look, for instance, look there," she purred, with intention, "next to that stout man opposite — do you see the lady in *soie de mousseline* and a blue *broché* jacket?"

Monsieur Tchéou looked in the direction indicated and turned to his companion with an incredulous smile, for he saw the point:

"Oh," he demurred, "I think you much more . . . *chic*."

"How nice of you! That is a great compliment, from a foreigner. I am told your Chinese ladies wear such lovely dresses."

"Rich. But so different."

"And, of course, they are pretty. . . ."

"Not like the French. . . . Oh, no! . . . The French are the prettiest in the world. I want to live here. I can not leave Paris now. I should miss it too much."

Courtship

And, fearing lest he had gone too far, he added quickly:

“Paris is the prettiest city in the world.”

But Thérèse had understood. Monsieur Tchéou would miss her too much. She would be rescued, she would be rescued! How, she did not know, but she would be! Her joy was too great for utterance: she said nothing lest she betray it. The rest of the afternoon was spent in silence . . . and stolen glances. Thérèse thought Monsieur Tchéou the most perfect gentleman she had ever met, and so he was: all his gestures were measured and moderate, his words respectful, and his attitude showed a propriety and self-control amounting to virtue; there was even a peculiar charm in the original red of his placid face with its gentle eyes so full of heat and health. And for her companion she was the incarnation of the style, grace and charm of France. The millionaire, the man of action sat beside the dainty blond doll as submissive as a boy. He would

Orientale

gladly have sacrificed his country, fortune, and life for her, and he cursed his color, his race, his past, never realizing that his color, his race and his past gave him a greater charm in her eyes.

It was time to leave.

Excited and anxious, Thérèse wanted to return on foot and alone; the fresh air would give her strength to recover on the way and become once more her every day self. But Monsieur Tchéou would not hear of it.

"A lady like you," he said, with circumventing flattery, "can not walk home. . . ."

He almost forced her into a cab, slipped twenty francs into the driver's hand, gave him the address and, with a deep bow, disappeared.

Thérèse prudently drove to the Parc Monceau and there alighted and walked home.

She arrived in good time and since no occasion arose to refer to it, she was not obliged to mention her meeting with the Chinese banker: and

Courtship

he, of course, she was sure, would not betray their secret.

She was the more surprised therefore, when the usually taciturn Monsieur Lung chatted of one thing and another so irrepressibly that the conversation finally touched on Monsieur Tchéou, his family and his connections. To her consternation, she learned that he was married in Canton and childless.

Well, it was natural, and she had better know it at once. She could hardly expect her admirer to have reached the age of forty unmarried. But . . . it hurt a little!

The idea travelled in her ruinously. It spoiled her whole day. Finally, however, when it had worn itself out, it gave place to another:

“But he likes me better.”

And jealousy inflamed her love.

“He likes me better,” she repeated, as she retired. “He does, he does! He was embarrassed when I mentioned his countrywomen. He

Orientale

changed the subject. We were prettier, he said. He can not leave Paris. He loves me better. He will stay. . . .”

She gathered the fading carnations and piously tucked them, in her wardrobe, on the darkest slat, under a pile of her daintiest and most fragrant linen.



V

The Magical Car

THEN, for over a week, nothing more was heard of Monsieur Tchéou. To all appearance the life of the Beauchamps was as it had ever been. They rose, ate, went abroad, returned and slept with the same clock-like regularity: the same Chinaman sat at their board, odd as ever, speechless, discreet and immobile as an inanimate object. But it was only from habit that Thérèse now attended to her house: her heart was in her toilette which had grown so painstaking that she was occupied with it at all hours of the day. She was *prepared*. An unparalleled elation bore her on air, light as the listless lotus.

A week passed, and still Monsieur Tchéou's silence caused her no surprise. She had a dim intuition that something was in the wind, and

Orientale

nothing would have been more natural than to see him appear one morning with the wand-like word, "We are leaving to-night for China." She was experiencing that phase of love — which does not imply its keenest crisis but which colors exquisitely its first hours — when the rashest acts find us ready and unreckoning. Later caution develops and we seek to reconcile love and indigent duty. But at this period the soberest minds give cry, and whatever in the way of a mind Thérèse was blessed with, it was not with sobriety.

No one mentioned Monsieur Tchéou. No one mentioned anything. Georges and Eugène had forgotten him, now that he did not return; and besides, the perfect simplicity of his manners inspired grave doubts of his reputed wealth and they were frankly disillusioned. Unconsciously they resented his failure to appear in a theatrical make-up with a sword and fan. It was only too clear. Monsieur Lung had played

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them false: his tale of millions had been an artful bit of Oriental puff. And if anything was calculated to confirm their suspicion, it was his silence. Thérèse therefore was under no obligation to lie. No one would bring up the subject. All that side of her life — secret and mental as it was — was wrapped in auspicious obscurity. The drive, the tea at the Palace: these were her gold. She hoarded it happily. A drab calm lay over all things and in these favoring doldrums Thérèse lived her dreams, undisturbed.

But, for all her blind faith in her *fair Mandarin*, she could not foresee the less romantic but vastly more delicate surprise he was preparing her.

One afternoon, on her way to her mother's, she heard behind her, as she was leaving the bus, a soft voice.

“ Madame, may I speak to you? ”

She had to assume surprise (so little was she

Orientale

really surprised) but not pleasure, as her smile avowed.

“Why, Monsieur Tchéou!”

“I have not seen you for so long, Madame. Are you in a hurry?”

“Well, Monsieur,” she faltered, vaguely. Of course she had nothing to do, but she was a woman and women must always be occupied, in principle, though all their days cry defiantly, how? Thérèse minded her dignity.

“I should so like to talk to you,” he continued. “I should be so happy.”

He plied her with so winning a smile that Thérèse was minded to kiss him, an impulse which she lamely translated:

“Not here, Monsieur.”

“I know where.” His voice was low and timid but the accent was surer, and he no longer lacked words. (He had made astonishing progress in a week.)

“Oh, do you?”

The Magical Car

Monsieur Tchéou whistled imperceptibly and a gleaming motor drew up to the curb, piloted by a Chinese chauffeur in Parisian livery, with cap and goggles. It had been waiting, at a short distance, for this cue. Monsieur Tchéou motioned toward the tiny salon snug in its beautiful scarlet box.

"A public cab," he said, "was unworthy of you. I have bought this car for my stay in Paris. No one has used it yet, not even I. I wanted you to be the first."

She looked at it, dazed. In her wildest dreams such a thing would never have occurred to her. For her, for her comfort and company, he had purchased this luxury, as superior to the plush-proudest taxi as a residence on the Parc Monceau to a *bourgeois* flat. And he had been following her, unobserved. . . . For her! . . . For her! . . . It was, yes, it was almost a gift.

She stepped in, instantly at home, with sovereign ease.

Orientale

Within, the surprise developed. Everywhere were carnations, carnations in the three vials, carnations in every cranny, carnations in garlands, carnations strewn on the floor. And suddenly one smiled at her from his button-hole.

"Where shall we go?" he asked, at the door.

And, quelling her protest:

"You must decide. . . . Yes, yes! . . . You!"

She hesitated a moment, then, with the impulsiveness of a dreamlike caprice and no thought of the distance, she replied:

"Versailles."

"Versailles," said Monsieur Tchéou to the chauffeur, one of two native servants he had brought from the East.

And the car spun along swiftly, noiselessly.

For a moment she tasted triumph. Her eye roamed in wonder over the furnishings of the car. Everything was neat and in the most exquisite taste: the mirror, the *nécessaire*, the

The Magical Car

flower-holders, the color of the upholstery, the softness of the seats. The suspension was so perfect that she could almost have embroidered as she rode. It gave one a feeling of luxurious security and also, because of the speed, of domination, of a clear superiority over the crowd toiling on foot.

The old Thérèse, the Thérèse of a moment ago, the housewife, the bus-taker, vanished in a kind of mist: she knew her no more. And the others, Georges, Eugène, Monsieur Lung — idle phantoms! They had ceased to exist for her.

Her new life had begun, with Monsieur Tchéou for companion.

And he was overwhelmed, radiant. He hardly dared trust his happiness. The woman he loved was by his side, his prey, but inaccessible, so distant, with the charm of a little Occidental idol.

“You came, you came,” he murmured. “You are here. . . . I am happy.”

Orientale

She was happy, but as she could not bring herself to say so she cast about for something to say, and the recollection of her jealousy suddenly recurred to her unaccountably.

"You never told me you were married," she said. "I learned it the other day from your friend. How can you stay in Paris? I am afraid I don't understand."

He did not answer at once. He seemed deeply affected and embarrassed. It was over: their friendship would never again have the same indefinable innocence and joy. There would be serious things to discuss now: but never again that rare rapture of silence. Thérèse would gladly have recalled her rash words. Too late. Monsieur Tchéou had recovered himself.

"That is why I want to stay here. . . . You see, I am not happy at home . . . very unhappy. . . . But I could bear it. . . . I thought I could. . . . But now, no, now I could not go back."

He was unhappy. Her jealousy vanished.

The Magical Car

"I am so surprised," she said. "You seemed so calm, so contented."

"Calm, yes; not contented. I was married ten years ago. . . ."

"So was I."

"You see! — Ten years," he continued, musingly. "How could I know? I had money. I thought I wanted a family, a child to enjoy it and continue my race, a child born in wealth. . . . I had to work, you see."

"To work! You?"

"Yes, very hard."

Admiration was in her eye. Those millions had been earned and earned single-handed! What a man! What a contrast to the poor, weak, vain thing, her husband, to the silly, word-blown teacher! Very simply he continued, but in a lower tone:

"At first my wife was very gentle, but soon she became . . . I think the word is . . . cross . . . very cross and mean. We never had a child."

Oriente

I did not reproach her but I suppose she thought I did . . . and she made me very unhappy . . . so that at last I had to live outside the *yamen* . . . the house. . . . She would take my money and hide it. One day a jewel came from London, a very beautiful jewel, like nothing in Canton . . . She threw it into the fire. And many other things, little things; I forget. Then I shut myself up in my office and worked and made a great deal of money. But that is a poor consolation. Money, money, money, for nothing, for no one. I need very little. But I worked, I worked, I worked . . . to forget, I suppose, and also, maybe, to prepare . . . to prepare . . .”

He broke off, embarrassed. Silence fell between them. The only sound was that of the car speeding softly and lightly like a thing of air. Thérèse glanced through the window: a road, trees, the leaden river flowing under a drab sky. Running through this commonplace and unfriendly landscape, the tiny pearl-grey *salon* seemed a mar-

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velous haven. She nestled in it, breathing happily the touching odor of carnations already identified with her memories. Monsieur Tchéou continued:

“ I know now. I know what to do. I shall live in Paris. I have no ties in China. I shall go back, close my business, divorce my wife, and return. . . . Paris! . . . I want to end my life here, I want to have a child, a blond child, like those pretty little boys you see in the gardens — they are so pretty! . . . Oh, yes, I shall be happy here! ”

Again silence fell, but Thérèse cut it short. She was dying to relate her own life, and she drew a picture of it sombre and intermittently true. She told him the monotonous greyness of her days, the distress of her daily *tête-à-tête* with Georges and Eugène, the meanness of her domestic cares, the absence of all hope and finally the recent relief brought by Monsieur Lung. But Monsieur Lung, mute and discreet, had soon become but another figurehead in that sorry farce.

Orientale

A new sensation was added to their love: they pitied each other. Hitherto they had seen one another in a nimbus, in one case of wealth, in the other of beauty and elegance. Now they were both more human, more approachable, and how much more touching! Each could now succour the other. Monsieur Tchéou could deliver Thérèse from the burden of her vulgar, monotonous life, and Thérèse could give this gilded pauper the wealth of her smile, her blond hair, and her French grace. . . .

It was raining in Versailles, and Thérèse did not want to stop. The car swung about and returned to Paris. They saw nothing of the country, they were too intent on themselves and their talk. All these little details and anecdotes of their respective lives made them feel that no really appreciable differences of race existed between a man and a woman. Love effaced them all; and besides, the histories of the days, the really profound pleasures and pains were, after all, the

The Magical Car

same everywhere. . . . The real Chinese, the real alien, for Thérèse, was Monsieur Beauchamps, whose every act shocked her, whose thoughts, every one of them, wounded her delicate world of intuitions and dreams.

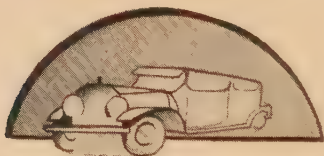
They met several times again in the course of the winter, in that magical car. Monsieur Tchéou never once abandoned his exquisite reserve and Thérèse was grateful to him for it. She enjoyed his diffidence: it was the most delicate homage; and she was careful to do nothing that might transform it into a more articulate sentiment. Indecision admits of all dreams, and women delight in it more, perhaps, than in definite joy.

Madame Larive, summarily informed that she was supposed to have received her daughter's visit on those days, divined many things, more undoubtedly than they did or than existed, and she conceived a darkling joy in these developments. She detested her son-in-law and for

Orientale

Thérèse to have an adventure, no matter with whom, seemed to her a vengeance in behalf of the embattled Sex as a whole against that boor, that fool, that failure. In her reprehensible rapture she so far forgot herself as to paint, one day, an extra fan which she kept for herself as a kind of trophy, suspended in her alcove.

To allay suspicion, Monsieur Tchéou came to tea several times in the evening, after dinner. He bore with fortitude the aphorisms of Monsieur Beauchamps and Georges and his jackanaperies, pitying Thérèse in secret. Of these the end, he vowed, was in sight.



VI

"*Pelléas et Mélisande*"

ONE afternoon in the late winter Monsieur Tchéou informed the Beauchamps that he had taken a box at the *Opéra-Comique*; they were invited to spend the evening with him and Monsieur Lung.

The flat was in commotion. Dinner was guzzled, the best clothes dusted off, Monsieur Beauchamps himself tucked into a dress suit — the one he wore for commencement — and Georges inaugurated a new, painfully narrow dinner coat.

Thérèse, on the contrary, tricked out like a beautiful doll with artful locks and a sheer and glittering gown, was exquisite, like a fragile bit of porcelain. Compared to her, her husband and step-son looked like a pair of country cousins.

Orientale

Ordinarily the contrast would have mortified her. But now she paid no attention to it: she was lost in the joy of seeing her lover again and of finding him always more delicately attentive. Those two vulgar males, her gloomy flat, the squalid servant, all that mildewed meanness: after all, was it not for a time only? Her conjuror would soon dispel it. And she could well afford to grant them a short-term smile.

Monsieur Tchéou called for them at eight. Heavens! how distinguished he was, how impeccable! No dandy could be neater. Over the shield of stiff linen, flat and snowy, rose in a noble eminence his face, shaven and smiling, warm with amber and red! He wore a magnificent carnation in his button-hole, and as she had decked herself with the same flowers, she affected surprise at the coincidence. He took it as a compliment.

The opera was *Pelléas et Mélisande*. I shall

"Pelléas et Mélisande"

not relate the inanities which Georges thought fit to suspirate into his neighbors' ears anent a play which he understood so dimly. His father could not refrain from emitting quite gratuitously some maxims on the Symbolist Movement, French clarity, the music of Lulli and Shakespeare himself. But no one heard him. Thérèse, seated in the front of the box, her arm resting on the red railing, had no other thought than the pleasure of being there, of feeling the presence and sometimes the breath of her "beautiful Mandarin" and all the love and desire with which he surrounded her. She knew she was pretty and well dressed, people looked at her, and the real performance lay not so much on the stage, with its vague and plaintive play, as in the auditorium, where she felt a rising curiosity. It was the first time in her life that she had been noticed in a public place, that people had asked who she was. Ah, soon . . . perhaps . . . they would know. . . . Soon she would be famous,

Orientale

fêted, known as an elegant and exclusive Parisian herself!

Still, she realized vaguely that the play sang of a languid lady harassed by a jealous husband. And when her cavalier leaned over her, she was infinitely moved to hear him murmur:

“You are blond . . . like Mélisande . . . and your husband does not understand you . . . like Golaud . . .”

Once again the shrewd Easterner had struck home. Is not every wife the victim of a cruel and suspicious husband? Monsieur Beauchamps, however, knew no jealousy: he was too dense to doubt.

In the last intermission the Beauchamps senior and junior, completely oblivious to the inadequacy of their appearance, insisted on strolling in the promenade to mingle with the parade of Fashion. Thérèse pleaded fatigue and as Monsieur Lung retired discreetly, she was left with Monsieur Tchéou.

"Pelléas et Mélisande"

Suddenly he spoke, very abruptly:

"We have only a few minutes."

"What do you mean?"

"I dared not before . . . I was afraid. . . .
I waited till the last moment. . . . Don't turn
around; smile; I see your husband and step-son
watching us."

Mechanically Thérèse smiled at her men.

"I am smiling. What is it?"

"I am leaving to-morrow."

Her smile turned to a twisted grimace. She
dared not turn away to hide it, lest Georges
and her husband notice her move. She replied
grimly:

"Leaving. . . . Why?"

"You know why."

They paused. Thérèse waited feverishly for
her two boors to retire from the embrasure in
which they seemed literally to have ensconced
themselves. Finally, her patience was rewarded
and she arose, convulsively.

Orientale

"Come," she cried, taking his arm. She led him into the lobby of the box.

"I don't know. . . . I don't. . . . Why are you leaving?"

She was pale, crushed. Monsieur Tchéou took both her hands, respectfully, made her sit down, and stood over her.

"I am returning to China . . . because I must . . . because I shall have no peace here, until I have settled certain matters there. . . . You know . . . what I mean."

She forgot everything, so great was her stupefaction that he could leave her, that he had the courage. . . . She said:

"You have courage!"

"I must have. It is best for me to go back . . . for a time and return, free. Free, do you hear? . . . absolutely free: master of my time, of my life, of . . ."

"I know, I know," she echoed, without grasping it.

"Pelléas et Mélisande"

Then, suddenly:

"You are not going . . . forever? "

"I would not go at all, if I could help it.
. . . You know that. . . . But it is better so.
. . . I have thought it all over carefully. . . .
There is no other way. It is hard, I assure
you. . . ."

"Really? it hurts you? "

He did not answer. He looked at her in silence,
with evident pain.

"How long will you be gone? "

"I don't know yet. . . . A few months, I
suppose . . . as few as possible, six, eight
months. . . . In any case, not over a year, at
most."

"A year! A year! . . . I shan't see you be-
fore spring? we shan't go driving together? "

"Please, please don't make it harder for me. I
have so little courage. I shall write you as soon
as I arrive. I mean, I shall write to Monsieur
Lung. He will give you my letters. . . . You

Orientale

will know everything . . . and you will write to me too, sometimes, won't you? ”

“ Monsieur Lung knows . . . ? ”

“ Yes, Monsieur Lung is my best friend. I told him everything.”

“ Ah! . . . But why didn't you tell me before? It's really too absurd to go off like this and tell me like this . . . no . . . I am furious . . . I . . . ”

“ Don't be angry, don't, Madame Thérèse. . . . If you knew, if you knew . . . ! ”

“ I know, . . . Didn't you know that I knew? . . . ”

She stood up transfigured and moved toward Monsieur Tchéou, who was looking at her ecstatically; she opened her arms and put out her hands . . . she was about to take his head in her hands, to look deep into his eyes, and to say . . .

. . . when the door opened, and Georges put his head in, smiling inanely.

"Pelléas et Mélisande"

"Sorry to disturb you," he said.

"You have not disturbed us," she replied icily.

"Only fooling."

"You may fool once too often. . . ."

"Oh, don't be angry! Can't I say anything? "

"I don't like your implication."

"My what? "

At this point Eugène and Monsieur Lung returned and Georges went back to his seat, playing, with an art of mimicry worthy of the lash, the persecuted victim of a heartless step-mother, the stoic who would brave the stake rather than complain.

Thérèse sat through the last act without hearing a note of it. She was waiting, for what seemed an eternity, for the moment when she could speak to Monsieur Tchéou under cover of the exit. Her brain was a chaos of contradictions: love, terror, panic-whipped desire. . . . She hardly knew what to think. . . . She had never foreseen this ordeal.

Orientale

At last they were on their way out. In the crowded corridor she overtook Monsieur Tchéou.

"Listen," she said, under her breath. "You will come back? Promise."



"I promise."

"I shall wait. Write me. Good-bye."

She caught his hand and pressed it. Then, with an audacity which amazed him as much as it did her, he slipped his arm about her waist, drew her to him and kissed her on the shoulder, murmuring:

"Pelléas et Mélisande"

"I love you. . . . Good-bye . . . I love you!"

Then, terrified, he slipped into the crowd and disappeared.

"Where's Monsieur Tchéou?" asked Eugène, as he returned with their coats.

"I don't know," replied Thérèse. "He was here a moment ago."

"You must not be surprised," said Monsieur Lung. "He is very impulsive. He disappears sometimes when you least expect it."

"Strange, very strange. He seemed so well-bred," remarked Monsieur Beauchamps sententially.

"Give me his coat," said Monsieur Lung. "I shall return it to-morrow."

It was a full week later, at table, that Monsieur Lung mentioned his friend's recent departure for Canton.

"Family matters, I believe," he added.

Thérèse shot him a glance of gratitude. If he

Orientale

had spoken of it sooner, she might not have been able to restrain her tears. But she could not frame a word, not even of astonishment.

Monsieur Beauchamps groped for some comprehensive remark, and it was several moments before he found it.

"Come now, confess," he said. "Monsieur Tchéou was not really as wealthy as you said."

"Yes, really . . ." protested Monsieur Lung.

And that was the last that was heard, at the table of the Beauchamps, of the opulent banker of Canton.



Oriente

THE SECOND PART

I

Uncertainty

THE days passed. At first Thérèse was hardly aware of them. She must allow time for Monsieur Tchéou to arrive and for his letter to return. In her husband's absence she pored over his maps. But of the maps she soon wearied: they were a mockery. The world in a few inches of paper; Asia under the palm of her hand; a pinpoint to locate the great sprawling city where her lover lived; and, as she looked up, the realization of implacable distances, the absolute impossibility of joining him physically: these were too painful a contrast. It was better to dream and dream she did.

She saw Monsieur Tchéou on the ship, at night, under the stars. He was thinking of her, dreaming, longing in the wake of the ship. Then she saw

Orientale

him at home, in his house, timid no longer but transformed, authoritative, unyielding, dictating his will to the wicked consort. Suddenly the woman collapsed, like a little boneless animal, in her gorgeous robes, in her pale, paper room. She wept, with short convulsive sobs, strangely like hitching laughter. But Thérèse had no mind to mock her. On the contrary she pitied her. Why had her little yellow sister lost the love of so good a man? He would have made her life so happy, but she would not let him. It was entirely her own fault. And Monsieur Tchéou was the master. He must be obeyed.

Besides, he was not cruel. He wanted freedom, and the terms would be liberal. The wicked wife would resist for a little, but she would yield. He would leave her everything: the house, the marvelous gardens, the servants (all but the one who drove him in Europe) and an income sufficient to live luxuriously and maybe even to attract another husband.

Uncertainty

The divorce is pronounced. Monsieur Tchéou is free. A few days more, for his farewell conversations with his friends — Thérèse can not begrudge them — and then, a wind, ho! To sea!

Nevertheless, three months have passed. Monsieur Lung has no news. To broach the burning question would seem to imply a doubt of the absent one; besides, she has never spoken to him of her secret. He must know it, Monsieur Tchéou was explicit, but he intimidates her. He is so impenetrable, so shadowy, smooth and smiling. No, he has no news. But time drags, how it drags! What could have happened to him?

Thérèse struggled for support. He might be anticipating his letter and returning as a surprise: but then he should be here by now. . . . Suddenly, her tension collapsed, and she saw nothing beyond one implacable fact: Monsieur Tchéou was on the other side of the world and had not returned for her, and she had no address.

Orientale

She relapsed into listless dejection, haunted by the foul phantoms of foreboding.

These torments racked her all day, as she went about her work automatically, listless, obsessed, almost hounded. When evening came and she sat at table with Eugène, Georges and Monsieur Lung, motionless as puppets, grotesque, eternal as Fate, she seemed suddenly to be waking out of a dream. Momentarily, in dream, she had glimpsed the possibility of leaving this life on the arm of a nursery prince: — the mischief, the mischief of dreams! But the plain fact, the waking truth, was this: once upon a time in the Batignolles there lived a poor little *bourgeoise* with a professor for husband and a freak for company. To these she served soup, meat and sweets. And that is the end of my story! That was her life and would be evermore.

Waking evermore, dreaming evermore, the vista of those long identical days ahead prompted thoughts of suicide. She could bear her burden

Uncertainty

before she had shifted it or learned its weight, but now it broke her back.

Solitude woke memories. One thing was founded firm and could not be doubted. A man had loved her at first sight and had said as he left her: "I love you." That much was true. She had touched the hand of that man, and her bare shoulder had felt his mouth. He would come back. How could she doubt it?

After three months of cloistered life, her patience exhausted, she put on her hat and went out.

But that was far worse. Summer, streaked still with spring, was in its first sweet prime. The trees were green and fresh, opulently rounded, abundant, and a more brilliant air seemed to envelop everything. The men and women she passed were happy, unconscionably calm, supremely indifferent to her, and amid so much physical joy Thérèse felt bewildered and astray. Divining her distress, a gentleman, cruising, idle

Orientale

and trim, attempted to profit by it and gave chase. She fled in alarm. The gentleman interpreted her flight as a provocation and pressed his pace, panting brisk, equivocal compliments. She came home, exhausted, fell on her bed, and wept for hours.

But . . . yes. . . .

She was beautiful . . . she was attractive. . . . The magnetism of love pervaded her. Someone had roused in her these powers, stirred this seductiveness; and then he had fled.

What kept him? What kept him? Why did he not write? She had no one to turn to: she was surrounded by indifferent souls, as foreign to her heart as her tables and charts. Her mother? her husband? her step-son? neutral natures or hostile ones. The one man in the world to whom she had opened her heart and confided her stifled suffering was the most remote, the only inaccessible one. . . .

Monsieur Lung? Should she waive all scruples

Uncertainty

and . . . ? No. An obscure presentiment dissuaded her. He knew, his friend had told him, but how much did he know? too much? and was he worthy of knowing? above all, did he understand? He was so formidable, with his impressive smile, his unfaltering but unwarming courtesy!

Yet she must decide on something. After all, Monsieur Lung must have letters. But no! Punctual and shrewd she knew him to be, he would have slipped them into her hand, somehow, two hours later. No, it was quite useless to speak to him.

A week, two weeks, three, slipped by in this way. At last, one morning, at bay, Thérèse determined to speak. She gave herself until dinner.

Her plan was foiled in the most unforeseen way.

Strong in her decision, she had been much calmer all day. She was biding her time. Dinner was over, dessert was served, her phrase was ready.

Orientale

She would say, quite casually, as they rose from table, "By the way, dear Monsieur Lung, do you ever hear from Monsieur Tchéou? You have not mentioned him once since he left." Monsieur Lung, at that moment, looked up from his strawberries.

"I am moving to-morrow," he said. "I hope you will not mind. I have to live in another part of town for my studies. I have taken a flat on the Avenue de l'Observatoire. I shall never forget how charming you have made my stay with you."

The Beauchamps stared, dumbfounded. Manners so cool would ever be their despair. They would have talked such a project over for three months before broaching it. Really, these Chinese were too extraordinary!

"Well, I declare!" piped Georges. "Of all the cool —"

"Georges!" cried his father peremptorily. "Monsieur Lung is at liberty to leave us, when

Uncertainty

he pleases. He does so perfectly correctly, and I want no comment from you."

Thérèse was too baffled to speak. Had her life hung on it, she could not have put her question now. In fact, she had forgotten it. Her head swam. All her supports were giving away. Monsieur Lung had been a last, faint reminder of her lover, aloof, inert and impenetrable, but a vague association, a kind of reflection; and now he too was vanishing . . . failing her! She clutched the edge of the table: she felt a mechanical smile twisting her face, and in a slow colorless voice she articulated unconsciously:

"We shall miss you, Monsieur Lung. We shall miss you so much!"



II

Summer and Solitude

NOW she was alone, as completely alone as if she had been forsaken in a foreign land.

Yet better so: all company, all conversation being now intolerable. In her despair she was nursing a plan: she would not accompany her husband this year to Nevers, she would isolate herself in the flat in the *rue* Truffaut. Merely to say good-morning and good-evening twice a day to her companions was an exhausting effort, and often she was tempted to cry, "Go. Why don't you go? Can't you see I can't stand you?" She smothered the impulse, but her patience was worn raw.

Monsieur Lung had left on the eighth of July. It would be three weeks before Eugène started for Nevers. One day, toward the close of the school-term, he remarked:

Summer and Solitude

"Time to think of our holidays, Thérèse."

"Your things are ready."

"Yours too, I suppose."

"No. I shall stay here this summer."

"Stay! — Why?"

At the drop of that word, which she foresaw, she had planned to explode, to tell the poor man what she thought of their life, and boldly to demand her release. But she had not the courage. Eugène would not understand. It would be necessary to argue, and maybe he would conceive it his disastrous duty to remain with her. No, better veer. Better invent:

"Mother's health. . . . I have been worried lately. I would rather be near her."

"Well, well, this is a very tiring profession, you know. I don't know what I shall do without my two months off."

"But who wants you to lose them? I hope you don't think I mind staying here. In all these eleven years, I have hardly spent more than half a

Orientale

day at a time with my mother. She will be so happy! ”

“ I shall not insist,” he sighed, very much relieved, at bottom, that he would not be asked to remain with her.

And no more was said of it, or of anything.

For a few days longer she had to put up with them. Madame Larive had to be warned and Lise to be given a holiday, and finally she had to endure the horrible effusions at the station. . . .

And then, at last, slamming her door, Thérèse was alone, alone for two long months and responsible to no one!

Two months! Two months of freedom — and no one to reap them. Why all these visions, these vast desires, these nameless ardors, this muffled surge sweeping one on to God knows what mysterious destination of sense and soul? Why her charm, her beauty, her tireless struggle to remain pretty, smart and seductive? Why her

Summer and Solitude

youth and freshness, which an inactive, gloomy life, had preserved instead of blighting? Why life at all? What was its purpose? Why, from time to time, did hope still gleam overhead, like a meteor in the dark, leaving but a moment to form a wish, never to realize it?

She undressed, she lay down, she buried her head on her folded arms, as if to blot out the sight and hostility of all things, and wept slowly, at her leisure, sure that no one would challenge those solemn, voluptuous tears. At last she fell asleep.

That sleep lasted two days. But when she awoke, she knew that she could never spend eight weeks indoors, as she had planned. The light of the courtyard, reflected in her room, reminded her how irresistible was the season, the time of year when the humblest of God's creatures creep out of their holes to breathe the illusion of happiness, a happiness purely physical, the bare delight of being alive and drawing breath. . . .

Orientale

Was there any other happiness? It might console her. . . .

And anyway . . . anyway . . . she wanted to visit the places she had known with Monsieur Tchéou. She dressed and went out.

Midsummer Paris startled her. The air was no warmer than on the banks of the Nièvre and everything was redolent of an unfamiliar liberty and ease. The rare strollers sauntered lazily. As Thérèse passed them, fresh and improbable as a flower, all turned to stare at her, many to accost her, some to follow her. The attention she excited irritated and even disgusted her a little but it flattered her too. It proved that her beauty drew every eye compellingly.

Whose gift was that beauty? She had not been followed formerly, when she was younger. Those who love one leave one, it would seem, an allure of love. Once a man marks a woman with desire, she is charged with it as with a magnetic mantle, and others recognise her by its invisible

Summer and Solitude

hue. What hope excites them? Her surrender?
But she loves another — ?

and he was not returning. . . .

Another. . . .

Always the same question, recurring insistently, pitilessly, unanswered.

The next day Thérèse went out again, and every day thereafter. A new distress heightened her sadness: beautiful she knew she was, but barrenly beautiful! Her attraction had no purpose; her charm, who would share?

I, replied every eye, rapaciously.

She rebelled. No! No! Too brutal, they were too brutal. Europeans know nothing of love. One man alone had really loved Thérèse, and he came from the depths of Asia! Thousands of generations had civilised his gestures, his words, his very thoughts. He was gentle, discreet, good. To even think of these vulgar, pressing, cynical brutes was a betrayal.

Orientale

And she returned, ashamed, to a night of remorse and recollection.

But the next day temptation beckoned and she could not resist. A terrible struggle ensued between memory and vanity. That banal burning homage of the street smirched her still pure body and the fouling touch scorched diabolically. Her modesty resisted. She was no longer in tune with herself. And into her melancholy, so intact, now crept, to her infinite distress, an obscure and fatal corruption.

This unforeseen agony lasted all the month of August. Meanwhile, the obsession of Monsieur Tchéou still haunted her. She hoped against hope for a visit from Monsieur Lung, with news maybe of her lover's imminent return. What matter then all these cruel and empty weeks? A new life would begin; Monsieur Tchéou, in his indisputable omnipotence, would sweep her away as lightly as a man lifting a sacred fetic

Summer and Solitude

from mould. . . . Who could resist Monsieur Tchéou?

But he did not return.

One morning, consulting her calendar, Thérèse saw that it was already the fifth of September. In three weeks Eugène and Georges would return. She had completely forgotten them; but they lived, lived with an obstinate, indestructible life, and now they would settle on her again and crush her forever.

One last attempt then. Maybe Monsieur Lung had news and, timid and odd as ever, dared not bring it.

A new hope, delightful and invigorating, revived and excited her. She dressed carefully, exquisitely, lightly, and hurried off to the Avenue de l'Observatoire.

Monsieur Lung lived on the fourth floor of a little old-fashioned house, crowded between two office buildings. Thérèse climbed the four flights and struck a gong; Monsieur Lung himself

Oriente

opened the door, in a gown embroidered with thick blue flowers.

As he recognised Thérèse, his eyelids fluttered — the first fleeting sign of feeling she had ever seen him show. He smiled graciously, bowed her in, and led her to a divan in his little parlor, with the usual inquiry as to her health. She sat down, with a vague sense of pleasure in her surroundings, in these bachelor's quarters hung with Chinese silks, embellished with laquer and furniture darker than bronze, with statuettes and trifles, black, red, red, black, and high lights of gold gleaming like luminous smiles in the sumptuous gravity.

“I shall make tea,” he said.

And, on her demurring:

“I have enjoyed your hospitality for two years, Madame. You can not refuse mine for five minutes.”

She acceded. His courtesy reassured her and gave her the sense of being once more in her own

Summer and Solitude

world. Strange, though, strange that the little *bourgeoise* of the Batignolles should feel at home only among these men of the Far East, and that with her own countrymen she met nothing but vexation, vulgarity, selfishness and stupidity! . . . How happy she could be with a man of that race.

Monsieur Lung came and went, supple and silent, his shy little gestures fluttering about the tiny porcelain accessories. In a few minutes a subtle, scented tea, such as she had never tasted, stood before her. She savored it with delight but ventured no Occidental blunder of compliment. She had so often been shamed when Georges, clucking his tongue and wiping his downy lip, had said: "A good soup, Mother Beauchamps. First come, first served." How often she had read contempt in the impassive smile of the stranger at such manners! So she made no reference to the tea, but, glancing about her, ventured:

"I like your house."

Orientale

"Oh," he murmured, courteous and abashed. And they were silent.

That silence delighted her. It was the conversation she preferred, a language whose very wordlessness left complete freedom for thoughts and reveries. The myriad little living and mysterious beings that emanate from us and that are the best and most sacred part of us Thérèse had always hated to repress and dull with the set and lifeless phrases which the French feel obliged to exchange in company. There were people, then, for whom those mysterious little beings were sacred, people who resorted to speech only when those essential preliminaries had voiced everything instantly. She had known none before Monsieur Tchéou, and since then she had forgotten them. But their race was not extinct.

One of its sons was here now, physically present, full of attention, respect and kindness. How good it was to relax a little, in one's own world, with a Chinaman!

Summer and Solitude

She had to explain, however, why she had come. Nothing was easier now. All her timidity and hesitation had disappeared.

"What has become of your friend?" she said.

"What friend?"

"Monsieur Tchéou?"

The smiling face grew suddenly grave, a shade hard.

"I don't know," he answered.

"You don't know?" she echoed. "I thought he was your best friend."

"Yes."

"He hasn't written?"

"I have heard nothing."

The tone was calm but of a forced calm. Thérèse was too amazed to notice it.

"Do you think something has happened?"

"I don't know."

"But . . . aren't you surprised?"

"One should never be surprised by anything,"

Orientale

he said, as if he were reciting a maxim, "neither by the silence of a friend nor by anything else."

Suggestion? Intention? Thérèse felt dimly that he had put a peculiar emphasis on those words: *the silence of a friend*. Was he reading her a lesson? Was there not in fact on her part (and from the Chinese point of view) a lapse of intelligence or worse, an error in taste, to show such surprise?

Monsieur Lung seemed to regard Monsieur Tchéou as her friend, but in no greater degree than himself: it was impossible, therefore, to insist.

She was cowed and relapsed into silence.

"But I am at fault," said the young man, after a pause. "I have not asked you about Monsieur Beauchamps and your step-son."

"They are well," she said quickly, as if sensible of excessive condescension on his part. "They have been away since the first of August. I could not go with them. My mother is poorly."

Summer and Solitude

"Oh," he said, with compunction.

Then he added:

"You are alone in Paris?"

"Yes."

"And not bored?"

"Horribly."

The word echoed with startling force. Alarmed and unable to retract it, Thérèse felt that she had gone too far not to go further and she longed to complete her confession, to talk tenderly and long of Monsieur Tchéou to one who would never betray her. But an unconquerable cowardice, a kind of incomprehensible fear restrained her. She was silent, leaving Monsieur Lung the full impression of that desperate cry.

"Maybe, if you had gone with your husband. . . ?" he suggested, politely.

She looked at him steadily, and he dropped his head, as if he were unworthy of the complicity of her confidence, and murmured:

"I am sorry."

Orientale

Thérèse was overwhelmed. She had not spoken three words and he knew everything. And he had asked nothing. The whole secret of her life lay in a stranger's hands, and he was obviously dismayed by it, since he had apologised, as if he had intruded on her privacy.

Yet she felt none of the embarrassment she would normally have experienced. Monsieur Lung was too delicate. Her only regret was that she would not be able to bring the conversation back to Monsieur Tchéou: his friend had cut her off finally. But this disappointment was lost in a rush of reflections.

She let herself drift with them.

Suddenly, she realised the hour. She had arrived in the late afternoon. The light was waning. She must go. She rose with a conventional excuse.

"May I see you home?" he asked.

"I shall be delighted."

How could she refuse?

Summer and Solitude

He slipped off the embroidered robe and in his modern clothes and with a straw hat was transformed into a highly presentable escort.

"The air is so lovely," she said, as they reached the street. "I shall walk."

He fell in with her. Intermittently she turned toward him, and though he said nothing, she saw that he was happy!

For the first time in the two years he had spent in France he was escorting a lady.

As she turned at her door, he said:

"You are dining alone?"

"Yes."

"I am free too. Will you dine with me?"

She accepted, unable to conceal the pleasure of escaping the solitude of her four walls.

They drove in an open hack to the Bois, around the lakes, and descended, as night fell, at the Châlet du Cycle. Thérèse had never dined there, and everything delighted her, the paper lanterns which Monsieur Lung had placed around the

Orientale

table, like a hedge of transparent fruits, the unreal shades of which decomposed exquisitely, note by note, in the interminable gloaming; the wicker cage of *crétonne*, in which she was ensconced and laughingly lost; the immense trees with their lofty forms blending into the night. The champagne giddied her a little, not much, enough to obliterate her troubles. Life was beautiful, so beautiful . . . there was no reason why this hour of respite and peace should end ever; no reason, none, none at all. . . .

She prolonged that nocturnal repast artfully, and when it was time to go, she took Monsieur Lung's arm, familiarly, for the exit.



III

Illusion

W HERE are you taking me? ” she asked suddenly, in the cab, on the way home.

“ I wish,” he explained in a slightly altered, slightly stressed voice, “ I wish that you would do me a favor. I wish that you would come up for a moment to my rooms.”

“ But it is late, how can I? ”

“ It is never late, on a night like this. . . . Please! ”

“ But I don’t wish to.”

“ Wish then. What are you afraid of? ”

“ I don’t know. It’s so unusual.”

“ A moment, just a moment. . . . I promise you. . . .”

They were at his door: he handed her out and drew her towards the stairs.

Orientale

She went up, half dazed, without even noticing that he had dismissed the cab.

Once more they stood in the room they had left a few hours earlier.

A little lamp illumined dimly the thick purple and lacquer with its deep reflections. The closed windows, the air of the summer day no longer thwarted the scent of incense which filled the atmosphere.

Thérèse was a little intoxicated, half unconscious, as she asked:

“What . . . what do you want of me?”

He did not reply immediately, as he looked at her deeply.

“I am thinking,” he said at last in a slow, grave, penetrating voice, “I am thinking that you are very beautiful.”

“What is that to you?” she still found strength to say.

“Everything,” he replied. “I think of nothing else.”

Illusion

"You think I dress well?" A feeble imploration.

"Yes, but I don't mean your dress. I mean you . . . you . . . not your dress. . . ."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in shame, bending her arm over her eyes. "You must not say that."

"Why not? Why not? I think it. I have thought it ever since I saw you. . . ."

"You?"

"Yes. You don't know what you have been to me these two years. . . . I have forgotten my very country."

"You said nothing. . . ."

"How could I . . . ? We were never alone. How could I there? I was afraid. Yes, afraid! . . . and of you! . . . Not till this evening, not till these hours spent with you, have I found courage. . . . Ah, no! do not go now, do not!"

"But I must. . . ."

"Stay. You said you were horribly bored. If

Orientale

you only knew how bored I am. . . . It is deadly. Why shouldn't we be together? "

Then, in a colorless voice, like someone reciting a verse of a loved poet:

"The things I would tell you that rise to my lips and that I thrust back on my heart! "

"What . . . what things? "

"My burning thoughts. They are all yours. Ah, why, why? "

"Monsieur Lung! What is the matter with you? You frighten me. . . ."

"No, Madame Thérèse, please, please do not say I frighten you. I love you. How can I frighten you. . . ? "

"Stop, Monsieur Lung, stop! "

"No, let me speak, I have kept still so long. And now that you are here to-night, now that no one is waiting for you, now that you are free, for the first time in your life, stay, Madame Thérèse, stay with me. Is it so terrible here? am I so dreadful? "

Illusion

An insurmountable lassitude, an immense longing to surrender once, just once in her life, to be irresponsible, to know love at last, invaded her. As it rose like a flood in her, step by step, the



palace of her will, her useless, futile will, crumbled to joy. Monsieur Lung had taken her in his arms, he had pushed back her head and fastened on her mouth with a kind of respectful and terrible craving.

With a devilish skill and without releasing her lips, he undressed her, discovering the hooks, the buttons, the ribbons, guessing them under the

Oriente

linens and cambrics. When at last only her hair hung about her, he lifted her lightly, like one of his little statues, and stripping the bed of its cover with a sweep of his hand, laid his prey on it, pallid on the spun silk of purple.

Then, with tender words, florid, specious and exquisite as in a poem, he caressed her artfully and long, almost imperceptibly, lightly as a violin in the first measures of a prelude, until she lay both sleeping and vibrant, ripe for the sovereign accord.

She thrilled to him, subject and ceding. Then she fell into a deep sleep, spent with so many emotions. . . .

She had a dream, which she never forgot. . . .

In her dream she lay on that same bed, with another partner. He was kissing her softly on the eyes and saying:

"This is our wedding night, Madame Thérèse. I love you! You are good and faithful, you waited, I am grateful, we shall be happy. I knew

Illusion

you would trust me, my letters helped you. . . . Tell me they helped you! Now everything is settled. My wife has gone, I have left her the house. I am building a new one where none shall set foot before you, where I shall enter only behind you, and live . . . and live . . . in *your* home. If you do not like your *yamen*, your little palace of pinks, we shall return; I go where you go, your land is my land, I have no other. You are my wife, my stranger queen, my little pale princess."

"And you are my lord," she replied, ecstatically. "I want you, nothing but you. I have found joy."

Then he smiled divinely, like the golden Buddhas, seated on their lotus leaves and relishing to the roots the fullness of Wisdom. That fullness and that smile Monsieur Tchéou had discovered in love. And he repeated over and over, as if nothing in the world so dilated his heart:

"You waited for me! You were faithful!"

Orientale

Then he rose and Thérèse put out her arms to hold him and he was gone.

She awoke and saw herself naked beside another man whose hand rested on her breast, in a sign of domination. And that man was not Monsieur Tchéou. Her betrayal was atrocious, her action irreparable. She burst into sobs. But however she stifled them, Monsieur Lung heard them:

“What is it? Why are you crying, my beloved?”

My beloved: Monsieur Lung's supreme stroke of craft sealed his victory. But for that phrase, she would have found courage to rise and leave him forever. That phrase, however, was balm to her heart, seared with remorse. Once again the ingratiating Oriental had found the weak joint in her armor. She was his, she was his “beloved.” And since he was here and the other was not, so be it. She would love him. But he must love her! Love! she must have love! All her life had been tending to this fruition; thirty-two years

Illusion

Nature had moulded her body to this degree of fullness and perfection. So be it, Nature! So be it, for better or worse.

Tchéou, anyway, was the first, the prophet and forerunner. Nothing could change that. This one might take her, break her with love, overcome her, blind her, but he would never efface that pristine, incorruptible, eternally fresh image of the other, lustless and deferential, all love, pure love, who had said, "I love you," as he placed a kiss on her shoulder! He was her betrothed. She had lost him, yes, and forever, but through no fault of hers. She would always remember him and keep him the most secret and suave place in her heart. This one was her lover, all ardor, all desire; he had profited by the immense conspiracy of age, circumstances, the season, the beauty of the world, and the irresistible force of the senses. It was good, it was sweet, passionate, but not impure, it was love also.

Love is great. Too great for the heart of a poor

Oriental

little woman, ephemeral and unhappy, to hold. Was it strange that love should submerge her, hurl her into the vortex of its contradictions? or that the prejudices of her school days and the ideas of the Batignolles could not be reconciled with it?

"What is it, my beloved?" repeated Monsieur Lung, softly.

"I don't know. I am ashamed."

"Of what?"

"Of all this. I should not have done it."

"Whom are you wronging, if I love you?"

"I don't know. Please, please don't question me. . . . Love me, love me dearly. . . . I need it, I can not live without love now."



IV

Decline

NOT until she came home did she feel any surprise at what she had done. Then, however, the full force of it broke on her: the incredible contrast with this middle-class calm, with the inert resignation of her furniture and shabby wallpaper, with this gloomy, lethargic atmosphere in which nothing could vegetate but sentiments of slavery, submission and extinction! Thérèse was so astounded that at times she lost all sense of her own continuity. The woman who lived here, in this dark ugly hole, could not be that strange soul, intoxicated with love and liberty, who had surrendered on the other side of the river, there, far away, in a fabulous setting out of the Orient! Thérèse knew both these women, but separately: she visited them alternately, but they did not

Orientale

know one another. Else how account for such recklessness?

It was ten o'clock when she came home: but the *concièrge*, knowing that she sometimes spent the night with her mother, showed no surprise. She spent her day wandering about the flat, bewildered, lost, forgetting to eat, to undress. Remorse she had none, for there was no betrayal of duty. Duty to what? duty to whom? Eugène Beauchamps? That drab soul had made so little impression on her life, that now she could not even recall his features. She had to open an album of photographs, and even then that neutral, featureless face revealed nothing, galvanized in her no memory, and as she closed the volume pensively, everything slipped back into nothingness.

Some books she had read, some plays she had seen, some vague reminiscences recurred to her, in which the act of betraying a husband was presented as ludicrous for him and portentous for her. She could not understand. What harm had

Decline

she done in giving to another what belonged to no one? and how could all this wrong Eugène, who had not the remotest inkling of it?

No, what struck her was the force, the rarity, the novelty of her sensations. There was no equivalent anywhere for last night or her sensations since: each minute brought a surprise, everything had conspired to amaze and enchant her, everything, even the light, changing each second, from the evening gleams, horizontal and lustreless, to that dim, mysterious glow of the lamp in which she had looked on herself naked and so strangely beautiful and similar, under his subtle and ethereal caress, to an ivory statue laid out on purple.

Then she remembered his tender and violent embrace, and a long reverie ensued, even, unbroken, unruffled, a reverie like a great stream on which she floated, unaware of its flow.

A vast, powerful, profound, voluptuous reverie, with no definite images, no memories, bear-

Orientale

ing her onward on an ocean of unconsciousness. She awoke on a sofa. It was five in the afternoon. Instantly, as if drawn by a force foreign to her will, she returned to her lover.

Monsieur Lung opened the door, as on the night before, calm, smiling, and Thérèse might almost have believed that it was the night before, had he not taken her at once into his arms, with tender words.

After that, she returned to him daily, daily expecting new pleasures and finding them daily, so strong was her craving for joy: and the world was become something virgin, magnificent, teeming with light and feeling. She discovered her body, passionate, tender, rich with an infinite reserve of youth, as one discovers, immured in the mouldy wall of a cellar, an ingot of gold, unknown, brilliant, intact.

There are certain days in our life which belong to us, which Fate cedes us, when circum-

Decline

stances, at other times so hostile, seem to conspire in our favor. Just a few, a very few days, and but once in a lifetime . . . then all is over. . . . The days of our happiness.

That divine hour had struck for Thérèse. She lived it to the full. Only very much later did she realize the benignity of the great forces of the world during those blessed weeks, the first in her life when no one harassed her, tortured her, or set her servile mean tasks.

She was far from realizing it yet. In simple and pure heart she tasted the pleasure of living and being loved, unhampered, with no sense even of the flight of time. . . .

It sounded, that hour divine and unenduring, it sounded, but hardly had Thérèse leapt to its last vibration than it was over, and life claimed her again.

On the twenty-fifth of September she received a letter from Eugène, announcing his return two days later. It struck her like a blow

Oriente

between the eyes. She wheeled, giddy; then, panic-stricken, she ran to her lover:

"Goldie, Goldie, we are lost."

"Why?" he asked imperturbably.

"My husband is returning."

"Well?"

"Well? Don't you see? It's all over."

"Why?"

"How can we meet now?"

"You went out before in the daytime?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is to prevent your doing so now and coming here?"

"It's different. . . . It will never be the same again . . . I didn't realise, I never thought. . . . Oh, I won't try to explain, you wouldn't understand."

And she clung to him desperately, full of love and incoherence. And they loved one another fiercely. But however strained her passion, she felt that it was passion no longer. Everything was

Decline

the same, even more ardent, profound and savage, but happiness, the elusive guest, had flown. The deep-flowing stream had cast her on a sharp reef, and all the caresses of that stream would only embed her more deeply and rend her more cruelly.

It was over.

Two days later, in the evening. Thérèse was sitting between her husband and step-son. She looked at them with a kind of mournful horror. They were on her again, with all their weight, stupid, smiling, as if nothing had happened, handing her their plates to be filled. And it would be like this always, always!

"You are very strange, my dear," said Monsieur Beauchamps, dimly sensing her depression.

"Strange? Not at all. It is you who have changed."

"Have I? "

"Yes, you have color, the country has done you good."

Orientale

"We missed you so often. Paris is frightful in summer. What on earth made your mother fall ill?"

"Not ill, exactly. . . . I told you. . . ."

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Ailing, you said, ailing. Well, well. Distressing, but not dangerous. . . ."

"All the same, Mother Beauchamps, better show us your tongue, by the look of your eyes —" drawled the unconscionable brat, now in full flower of the graceless age and uglier than ever.

She flushed, hardly controlling her temper.

"Eugène," she said. "Will you *please* make him stop? I can't stand him any longer."

"Tongue's all right, anyway —"

"My lad, that will do. One word more, and I'll take you by the scruff of your neck and send you flying through that window," cried Thérèse, beside herself.

Monsieur Beauchamps had risen, aghast, but Georges was already retorting:

Decline

“What’ve I said? . . . You *are* touchy. . . . Try it, just try it. What do you think I am? . . . The scruff of my neck! . . . Ha! Ha! That’s funny, that is. . . . You’ll be sorry you said that.”

And he gave her a black, implacable look, in which all the rancor and baseness of his nature seemed not so much to shine as to be spewed up.

“What is the matter with you two?” cried Monsieur Beauchamps, when he could speak.

“The heat? or what?”

“I expect an apology,” said Thérèse, seating herself again.

“But, my dear, he meant nothing. . . .”

“Didn’t he? . . . Very well, Eugène, I shall remember that. . . . Well, young man, I am waiting?”

Monsieur Beauchamps turned to his son.

“Apologise,” he said.

But his eye cribbed: “Do it, what do you care? Can’t you see she is nervous?”

Orientale

"Very well," said Georges, rising and going to Thérèse. "As a matter of form, I apologise. Courtesy requires it. I am sorry, Mother Beauchamps, if I offended you. My tongue runs away with me sometimes, you know."

Then, in an undertone, he shot at her:

"The scruff of my neck! I won't forget that in a hurry."

And he went back to his seat, with the blandest of smiles.

The next day Thérèse returned to Monsieur Lung. What had formerly been her whole life, however, was now no more than a compensation. She returned to her lover because life at home had grown intolerable but its echo pursued her, spoiling her sweetest hours. She arrived in terror, stayed less than she intended, and left again, panic-stricken. This was not love: it was adultery.

And now, to complete her defeat, the memory of Monsieur Tchéou began to reassert its rights.

Decline

She tried to put him away as a true believer, yielding to sin, puts away the image of his God or a married woman her communion veil, but that memory would not be dismissed. It returned, like an obsession, crowned with remorse.

"It is me you have betrayed," Monsieur Tchéou would say. "You said you would wait for me."

"But you never wrote," she protested, "you never returned."

"That is no excuse," replied the phantom, "and you know it. If you had loved me, you would have waited. What a life you would have had! "

"And later you would have accused me of loving you for that life. I have given myself to a poor man."

"Generosity? Cant, Thérèse, cant! You betrayed me. You never loved me."

"I loved you. I swear it."

Oriental

"You loved love. First come, first served: Tchéou, Lung. You loved love."

"I loved you. Stop it. Don't drive me mad!"

And to forget, she fastened desperately on Lung's affection.

"Console me," she said, "I am so unhappy!"

"Beloved!" murmured the Yellow Man. And his wheedling was so tender and shrewd that it put to sleep — for a time — her pain.

To all the former fatigues of her life were now added, to make them intolerable, lies, furtive haste and remorse toward a shade.



V

Explosion

As, however, in time we accustom ourselves to everything, at first from necessity and by and bye from cowardice, Thérèse resigned herself to that life and lived it as best she could. Her tension had relaxed, and she experienced in all its bitterness that terrible resignation which the proud have honored with the name of wisdom. She had no further illusions: she balanced her life, like a skilful financier his debits and credits. She was trying to adjust herself.

“Anyway,” she would say, when she tried to hide from her all too clear insight the depths of her disappointment, “ anyway, this is better than yesterday. I have a lover and I see him when I want to. Formerly I lacked even these hours of illusion and love; and now they must console me.”

Orientale

And this argument silenced — more or less — the feeble voice, the immortal voice that cries out in every human soul for the absolute and finds no answer.

So she met Monsieur Lung constantly. Nothing was easier, for Monsieur Beauchamps had never watched her. Besides, he was always out in the afternoon, when Georges was at school. She dispatched her duties in the morning, left Lise to take care of the rest (incurring thus some small catastrophes, always delicately detected by Georges) and took to her heels.

Madame Larive had also to be warned, casually, but with an air that brooked no reply:

“I have been going lately, going out a good deal,” she said. “Life is impossible at home.”

“Anything new?”

“No, that’s just it. I can’t stand it any longer.”

“Well, my dear, you have stood it ten years. . . .”

“And can go on standing it? . . . No, I

Explosion

can't. That's the difference between us. But that is not why I . . ."

"Take precautions? No, I suspected as much. You would just as soon they didn't know at home why you go out?"

"I don't know anything more trying than to have to account for every minute of my day. I want to be free. So I have told them, once for all, that I spend my time with you."

"You may count on me. I have never pried into your affairs, have I?"

Madame Larive smiled, deep in her own memories. She recalled her Austrian and one or two others. . . . Ah! if only her daughter would imitate her prudence, she would never have any trouble at home. . . . But how to suggest. . . ?

And she let her go without further question.

This situation continued for a month, two, three months, and Thérèse saw no warning sign ahead. In the regularity of this new arrangement

Orientale

of her life she found a sense of deceptive security. She had almost ceased to take any precautions, thinking them unnecessary.

One evening, Madame Larive was dining in the *rue* Truffaut, and she had played to perfection the rôle of a mother deeply moved by the recovery of her daughter's affection. Monsieur Beauchamps, unchanging as ever, seemed the ideal example, the archtype of the unambitious little school-teacher, and Georges continued to powder the conversation with punitive puns, which she no longer even heard.

December ended thus. The New Year brought with it its little illusion of a re-birth, its hackneyed good wishes, its conventional embraces. . . .

Then Thérèse began vaguely to feel that her husband had changed. He was making vain efforts to control himself, growing nervous and even cross, criticising the organisation of his

Explosion

household, and when Georges waxed facetious, he shut him up sharply.

But she paid no attention to his bad humor, attributing it to the fact that once more, after so many promises, he had been refused the modest raise in salary to which he was entitled.

One evening, to her surprise, she found herself pitying him. Life was not easy for him either. He was toiling for a mere pittance, and now that the lodger had gone, he could not meet the new difficulties which that raise would have dispelled. . . .

Suddenly Monsieur Beauchamps, who had been staring at his wife, started. A nervous spasm contracted the muscle in his left cheek; he clenched his fist and crushed a nut.

Then, wheeling on Georges, who was smiling idiotically, he cried, furiously:

“Get out — you!”

“But, pater,” said Georges, dumbfounded, “I’m not through.”

Orientale

"Don't talk back. I want to speak to your mother. Out! "

"Can't he hear what you have to say?" said Thérèse, no less bewildered.

"No," said Monsieur Beauchamps, curtly.

Georges vanished.

Eugène sat for a moment, breathing nervously and trying perfunctorily to chew his nut. Obviously, he did not know how to begin.

"Thérèse," he said at last, and he brought out his words painfully, "I thought you a good woman. . . ."

"Well? "

"Well — you are not. . . . It is too terrible to know that . . . No! . . . No, I can't say it, I can't. . . ."

Thérèse went pale. She rose. All was lost, suddenly, without warning. She did not even think of defending herself: she waited, in challenging silence. She felt like crying, "Well, well, say it, end it." But the poor man could not. He too had

Explosion

risen in extraordinary excitement. He poured a full glass of wine and drained it off. Then he continued:

“For the last five days, I have been trying . . . but I cannot. I cannot work. . . . I don’t know what I am doing. . . . You have hit me too hard.”

He paused as if unwillingly he were waiting for his wife to invent some excuse, to deny the evidence, to say something, anything, but to speak. But her mouth was closed hard, as if silence were her only dignity.

“You . . . Thérèse Beauchamps, the wife of a professor . . . you dared to . . . do such a thing! . . . I know, I know when you go out, I know when you come home, I know where you go. . . . Disgusting! . . . No shame? . . . A Chinaman . . . a yellow — no decency, nothing? . . . a corpse, a dead man, that’s what he reeks of . . . decay . . . I know it, I have read they all smell of death there, of slime, of — I

Orientale

don't know what. Were you mad? . . . Thérèse . . . you have betrayed me, after eleven years of virtue and peace. . . . What possessed you? Answer me."

She shrugged: there was no answer.

"You won't speak? You won't tell me? . . . You don't know yourself. . . . To think that I spied on you, that I—played the detective! The *concièrge* knew enough to know nothing. But I bribed the man next door and he remembered. He had seen you once or twice. . . . You had been coming since last summer . . . profiting by our absence. . . . Yes, I know everything. Deny it! You can't. You can't. It's an outrage. . . . A Professor's wife! . . . What made you do it? A Chinaman! Weren't you happy here?"

That word released her.

"Happy!" she gasped. "Was I happy? You ask that! Are *you* mad? Look . . . look, for once in your life. . . . Living in this hole . . . by

Explosion

gas light . . . ugly, poor, squalid, mean. . . . Doesn't it make you sick? What are you made of? . . . Happy! Ah, no, no, anything you like, but not that word. It's an insult! Happy! What do you take me for? Happy! Here? I? Why, I was ready to end it all, to jump in the river. . . . You never thought of me, did you? Have you ever said a kind word to me? have you ever talked intelligently to me? ever praised me, complimented me? have you ever lied to me, to make me forget all this misery for a moment? Eleven years! eleven years in a rat-hole, in a mouldy hole in the wall, eleven years I have been scrubbing and scraping to keep us from the street, from starving, from death, and you expect me to say I enjoyed them! . . . Oh, I know, I know. You are a victim, too, but I can't help that. That doesn't help much. When I think how little a woman needs: an occasional kind word, a trifle, something, anything, to show that her husband thinks of her and tries to please her! And that

Oriental

pittance, that nothing — you couldn't find it in your heart. . . . You married me to iron your shirts and prepare your meals, and the rest meant nothing to you, did it? . . . Oh, yes, I have been happy! . . .”



Monsieur Beauchamps listened to his wife in speechless amazement. He had expected her to fall on her knees, in confusion and remorse, and she was rebelling, reversing their rôles, daring to complain!

“You,” he said at last, offended in the very seat of his reason, “*you accuse me?*”

Explosion

"I am not accusing, I am explaining. You wanted to know why I did it. Well, I am telling you. . . . But you can't understand. . . . If you could, you would have long ago — and all this would not have happened. It's useless to explain."

"You won't deny it?"

"Why? You know."

"Cynicism! That's the last straw. I should never have thought it of you. Instead of blushing, instead of begging forgiveness. . . ."

"Forgiveness! Have you ever asked mine for this life? No . . . I never expected you to. . . . You don't even know the wrong you have done me. . . . Absurd! . . . I have not done it to hurt you; it was not spite; I wanted to live, to feel myself a woman, not a servant hired by the day! No, I shall not ask forgiveness."

". . . You — ! . . ."

"What are we going to do?"

Orientale

"Do! . . . You shall see. . . . Do . . . ? You shall stay here, you shall not stir from the house, till I let you."

"Keeping me in? like the boys at school, eh? "

"Exactly. You shall not stir."

"Poor Eugène! I am sorry, our ideas are different. I am sorry you had to find out. But since you have, there is no point in my staying now. . . ."

"You mean — ? You are leaving? Leaving me? "

"Do you think I could stay now? "

"Going back to your Chinaman? "

"To my mother's, that's all. I shall be free again."

Monsieur Beauchamps lunged at her, foaming.

"No! " she said, evading him and with a spasm of resentment, "you'll not touch me. . . . You aren't strong enough. And what good would it do you? The best thing is to let me go. . . . I

Explosion

shan't take anything. I don't want anything. I'll leave you the flat, the furniture, everything. I shall send for my clothes."

"Thérèse!"

"Good-bye!"

"Ah, no, no! — Georges, Georges!"

"Yes, pater?" piped the ineffable brat, appearing so promptly that it was obvious he had been at the door all the time.

"Georges, your mother wants to leave us. Do you hear? She wants to. . . ."

"Well, well! . . . What for?"

"Make her stay, do you hear? Make her . . . tell her she must stay. . . . She can't go like this. It's horrible! . . ."

"But. . . ."

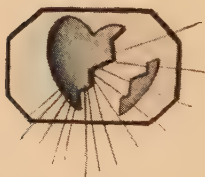
Thérèse shot the boy a look of repugnance which effectually discouraged any attempt at interference, shrugged her shoulders and walked out.

Whereupon Monsieur Beauchamps, in sense-

Oriental

less rage, fell on his son and taking his head between his clenched fists knocked it three times against the wall as he foamed in his face:

“ You sneak! You little sneak! You little spy! ”



VI

Honour

IT was a Thursday afternoon, so like those she had spent with her mother, so completely the same that Thérèse had to remind herself with an effort that she had not run in for a moment, as in the old days, but had been living here three months.

Through the open windows the acid and uncertain dusk of early April touched the table, where Madame Larive sat painting her fans. In nineteen months she had made no great progress. Madame Larive was a satisfied artist, and this was, I suppose, the ten-thousandth spray of rose and lilac, pursuing the same immutable pattern. By what excess of scruple did the worthy lady elect each time to paint them by hand, instead of using a pattern?

Oriente

Thérèse sat facing her, embroidering one of those bands of silk needlework in indeterminate arabesques which often bring the worker to the confines of age.

Madame Larive, of course, had never heard of Nietzsche but on the chapter of coincidence she was capable of conceiving the idea of eternal recurrence and of expressing it in her own way.

"Odd," she said. "Now really, if I didn't know different, I might think you were here on a visit, just like. . ."

"I know. I feel that way myself sometimes."

"No regrets, child?"

"That depends . . . Regrets? No — If you mean my life as a Professor's wife, no: no regrets."

"Dear me! If that is all you have to say to your husband, it won't help much."

"Are you sorry?"

"Yes, I am."

Honour

"Sorry? For him? or for me? or yourself?"

"Thérèse, what a thing to say! . . . You know what I mean. It is sad to see people part."

"When they were unhappy together?"

"Well, maybe you're right. It's just an idea, I suppose. But I can't help thinking it was all a misunderstanding . . ."

"No, mother, you know it was more than a misunderstanding. I am calm, because I am sure. If I were not, I would not have let Eugène come to-day. It is better to have one last calm talk: the other didn't count, it was too sudden."

"I've heard so many people say that. But when they meet, they make up."

"Wait and see."

"Well, all I hope is you'll show more energy than most people do at such times. And anyway, my dear, I must tell you what I think. I think you have botched the whole thing badly."

The vulgarity of the expression startled

Orientale

Thérèse. Her mother referred to the great problem of her life and happiness as a botched deal!

"Yes, my child," resumed Madame Larive, tracing a lilac with rounded arms and the graces of a professor of calligraphy. "I must say, you haven't been careful. In the first place, if only you had trusted me, I might have . . ."

"Stop, mother. . . . How could I tell you?"

"I know now, don't I? I might have saved you some mistakes. Your whole life is ruined."

"I doubt that."

"What will you do? Marry your Chinaman?"

"Once is enough."

"You mean to live with him without . . . guarantees?"

"And what guarantee is marriage, I should like to know? What does it save you from?"

"From desertion."

"Well, if that's all, I'll risk it. I mean to live my own life and to see the man I love when I

Honour

want to. That way, at least, he won't grow tired of me. Oh, that everlasting presence — how dangerous it is! . . . When I'm a burden to you, I hope you'll say so."

"Oh, my darling, you eat like a bird, you don't cost me a penny. I don't mean that! But outside of matrimony life is hard for a woman. Unless, of course, the circumstances are peculiarly favorable. . . . Well, I can't help thinking, if you had been a little more careful. . . ."

"Oh, mother, please! "

"Very well. I say no more. Besides, it's almost time. May I stay? "

"Of course. You must stay."

"Very well, if I must, I must."

The two women relapsed into silence. Strong and determined, Thérèse was thinking of her visit to her lover the day before. She had shown him her husband's letter asking for an interview. Monsieur Lung had insisted that she grant it: it was the only way of discovering what she

Orientale

was really capable of. A decision arrived at in the heat of anger could have no weight.

"I shall do whatever you wish," he had concluded. "Always. I do not wish you to sacrifice anything for me: I am poor. If you return to your husband, I shall not be jealous: I have faith in you. If you remain with your mother, that will be well also. Whatever you wish will be right."

So much consideration at a moment when a Frenchman would have thought it incumbent upon him to make a violent and high-flown scene had struck Thérèse with amazement. Such gentleness and self-control conquered her constantly anew, seemed each time more heroic, more rare and more beautiful. She believed it a magnificent triumph over the egoism natural to a lover.

The bell tinkled. The two women started. And the servant showed Monsieur Beauchamps in.

Honour

Thérèse was immediately struck by the change in him.

His grey hair had turned completely white. The pockets under his eyes underlined their lassitude, the deepening dullness of their expression. He was a little bowed: his feet turned in. He had thinned, but as he tended to flesh he seemed rather to have been deflated. His clothes (he was wearing his official frock coat) looked worn. As she caught sight of him, Thérèse felt her heart contract. He did not see her immediately, as he greeted Madame Larive punctiliously; but when he did, his hands began to tremble and the spasm which had come over him the night of the dreadful explanation contracted his left cheek.

"Good-evening, Thérèse," he said at last, extending his hand.

"Good-evening," she answered, stiffening.

And she did not offer him hers.

He sat down, already exhausted, and began to speak painfully.

Orientale

"I wanted to come," he said. "I wanted to see you once more . . . and speak to you. The other evening, that terrible evening when you left us, we did not really reach an understanding, did we? You were in the wrong and you knew it, and so naturally you lost your temper and cut loose and left me at once. But that is no solution . . . no . . . that is no solution."

He broke off. Madame Larive, her last fan painted and her colors put away, began lighting the lamps. Then she set out on the table three little glasses, a valetudinarian bottle of Malaga and a plate of dry cakes. The rites of hospitality, after all, are above such trifling accidents as family tragedy. They ignore and survive them.

Monsieur Beauchamps, seeing that his wife made no reply, continued:

"I realised that you would not take the first step. But the question is too serious to let personal vanity stand in our way, and so I came. You appreciate my feeling, don't you? "

Honour

He was careful to speak as coolly as possible, to convince her of his calm, and he chose his words neatly, as if he were in class. But in his heart was an indescribable confusion, and he could not express even a small part of it.

“ I shall not reproach you. What I have suffered since you went away you will never know. Stupefaction, for the most part, and bewilderment. I don't know where I stand. Eleven years — seeing you every day — and now, nothing. It is dreadful. . . . Hasn't it done something to you too? ”

He stopped short. He had suddenly realised the absurdity of those last words.

He tried to attenuate them:

“ I feel sure that you must have seen too that we can not part like this. . . . I can not even conceive of it. . . . So, you see, I have attended to the most urgent. . . . ”

His voice trailed away. Thérèse, without replying, looked up interrogatively, and he explained:

Orientale

"No one has the least idea that you have run away. I made up a story. I said that you had left town, for a time, on family business. Even Lise suspects nothing: the suddenness of your departure I explained by bad news and your consequent haste and distress. So everything is ready for your return. As for me, I shall . . . forget. . . . What do you say? "

"What do you want of me? " she said finally.

"Come home, start over."

"Oh, Eugène, you have understood nothing. You think I acted on impulse? I can not live with . . . in that house . . . that life. . . ."

"Yes, I know . . . you think it's too gloomy. But I have prepared a little surprise. I have ordered some alterations, you will see. . . . I have had a bay window put in, draped with white curtains: it is much more cheerful. Some of our things were too old, a little banal: I have had them done over. You think I could take better care of myself. . . . I shall. . . . I am wearing

Honour

my frock-coat, you see. . . . As for the little courtesies and cajoleries, well, Thérèse, of course, I am no lady's man, I should feel foolish . . . not being accustomed, you see. . . . Teaching young children. . . . But . . ."

He was making a superhuman effort to keep from breaking down and sobbing. Thérèse, irritated and upset, watched him struggle and suffer. His grief was sincere and profound, but what had it to do with her own desire for happiness, her right to freedom and joy? Why did it lie there in her way, like a beggar in the path of a pretty girl who has only her Sunday off and who is mad with the summer?

Still, the man suffered. Nothing could change that; and he was suffering on account of her, she could not deny it. What a struggle! How difficult to decide!

"Listen, Eugène," she said at last, "there are some things that simply can't be said . . . they are too hard . . . we don't want to hurt each

Orientale

other, but we do. . . . You tell me that the flat is more cheerful; but that is no reason for returning. It might have been once — when that was the cause of my unhappiness. But now . . .”

“ Ah,” he murmured, trembling again, “ now there is something else. . . .”

“ Yes,” she said, embarrassed. “ I can’t help it, don’t you see? I didn’t want it. . . .”

Monsieur Beauchamps, embedded in a profound meditation, seemed to be bringing himself to the final sacrifice.

“ I have thought of that also,” he murmured, in a very low, confidential voice, as if he were begging his hearers not to judge too harshly such a break with his old *bourgeois* principles, “ I have thought of it very carefully, and here is what I am prepared to say, if you will return on no other condition. Come home. You may do as you please under my roof, I promise to leave you entire freedom. . . . Do you understand? . . . I shall keep my pain to myself. . . .”

Honour

"But that would be too dreadful, Eugène, don't you see? As long as I am alone, no one need suffer."

"How do you know?" he asked, feelingly.

Then, after a pause:

"I have thought it over carefully, I tell you, and taking all things into consideration, I would rather have that. I want you at home. I am confident that you will keep up . . . appearances. But come, please come! . . . For the sake of . . . honor, you understand?"

Eugène Beauchamps was delivered of the one profound word of his life. His face, at that moment, underwent a kind of transfiguration. In a wan flash Thérèse saw the path of her duty ahead. Her resistance was shaken: a great struggle was going on within her. Eugène was watching her lips eagerly.

At last, closing her eyes, like someone too weary to see more, she said, in a toneless voice:

Oriental

"I cannot decide yet. . . . Wait till to-morrow. To-morrow I shall come and tell you . . . to-morrow."

"May I hope? "

"To-morrow. To-morrow."



VII

Collapse

THE following day, her decision made, Thérèse went out without imparting it to Madame Larive and made her way early in the afternoon to the Avenue de l'Observatoire.

That decision was the center of a swarm of thoughts, desires and regrets. Could a single night really be so fertile in agonies and uncertainties? could so much life be contained in so few hours? — when often nothing remains of a series of years, not a dream, not an emotion, nothing! She was an insignificant and unknown little woman; yet how much more pathetic and how much deeper was her romance than those so complacently related in novels! That thought gave her no pride, however: it left

Oriente

her crushed, overwhelmed, broken. Where had she found so much courage, such resourcefulness?

But what did such pangs matter? Madame Beauchamps had taken her decision. On that bright April day, under the budding chestnut trees, she was going to seek counsel of her lover.

She would say to him, quite frankly: "This is how matters stand. My husband wants me to come back. He is talking of honor, and, after all, I have my share of responsibility in that. What should I do? What do you want me to do? He is willing to let me live my life, provided I help him to save appearances, his vanity and his social conscience. What do you think? I shall do whatever you wish."

She was ready enough to accept half-measures, furtive assignations, a double life. So many women make the best of it! And since Destiny seems to deny us absolute happiness, we must

Collapse

cheat it, save our share of joy and carry it off to a corner to savor in the dark. The absolute of unblushing and legitimate felicity was an ingenuous dream of girlhood. She would accept. If only her lover were left her! . . . Now that she had come into bitter contact with reality, she felt herself fully capable of accomplishing, half-unconsciously, the thousand and one mean and ridiculous duties of a "Professor's wife," in return for the kisses, the caresses, the tender words, the peace which she would find in the little room of laquer and silk. . . . All things have their price.

And when she heard him say, "Accept" — but only then — she would return to her husband and say, "I have come." And life would begin again, and she would make what she chose of it. Time would show.

Nevertheless, at bottom and only half-avowed, hardly visible, an obscure hope was lifting its head. She kept it obscure, denied it expression,

Orientale

for fear, if it took form, of seeing its realisation fail.

If her lover, in an impulse of generosity, were to say to her: "No, I don't want you to return to him. Your real life is here with me, since I love you. I am poor, but here, in this little room you will find, with the semblance of an alien luxury, joy and peace. You will be happy. And since you are still free to choose, choose me. . . ." If he were to pronounce those adorable words. . . . Ah, exquisite thought! Too exquisite, too heady! . . . To live with the man she loved! . . . How impossible she would make all remorse, all regret for such generosity! She would be so light . . . so light! . . .

These reveries had brought her to her lover's door. She walked in, tranquil, composed, head high, as ever. . . . She was on the steps, when a voice called out behind her:

Collapse

"Madame! Madame! If you please!"

She turned. The *concièrge* had followed her and was gesticulating energetically.

"Madame! . . . Beg pardon. . . . Where are you going?"

"Why . . ."

"You're the lady, aren't you, that comes to see Monsieur Lung?"

Thérèse blushed.

"I know. I saw you here several times. It's not out of curiosity I'm asking. . . . My lodgers can see whom they like: it's none of my business. Only, if it's Monsieur Lung you're looking for, I can save you the steps. He left day before yesterday."

Thérèse, automatically, had descended the stairs. Now she stood facing the man, hearing but hardly trusting her ears. . . .

"What?"

"He has gone."

Orientale

" On a trip? "

Thérèse grasped the rail of the staircase. Everything swam before her.

" A trip? You might call it that. A long one. Home."



" Didn't you know? "

" "

" Well, he was a close one, sure enough. . . . I didn't know myself, a week ago. Day before yesterday, all his things were packed, and out he goes."

" For long? "

Collapse

"Forever. These foreigners, you know how they are: they come to France to study, and then they light out. It's only natural. They have their parents at home, and their work: they can't be spending their lives in Paris."

Thérèse was panting: no word would come, not even a thought. The *concièrge* continued, with satisfied perspicacity:

"He was a close one. I wouldn't wonder if he was a member of the Secret Service of his country. Polite? As polite as you please! I never met his like. . . . But there's no trusting those people."

"And he left no word for me? . . . nothing?"

"Oh, Madame, I'd have told you! — I wasn't born yesterday. No. I'm surprised myself he didn't tell you. . . . I thought you knew. . . . I . . ."

The good man was struck by her pallor, by the depth of her dismay, and feared to say

Orientale

more. He was tempted to offer her a drop of cordial, but he rejected the idea as unbecoming. . . . At last, his indignation got the better of him:

“ They have no hearts, those people. I always said so. . . . No hearts, no hearts! . . . ”

Then, seeing Thérèse sway:

“ Shall I call you a cab? ”

She started.

“ No. Thank you. . . . I shall walk.”

She was thinking that really, when you did not know where you were going, you needed no cab to take you there. She walked, walked, walked, dead ahead, aimlessly, unconsciously, mechanically, without even feeling her feet under her. Something was pushing her by the shoulders, something as aimless as she, that turned her right and left. Had she tried all her life to recall the way she went that day, she could not have done so.

Now through the Luxembourg, moving

Collapse

through the beautiful gardens where spring is peeping, where ravishing flowers are unfolding for sand-stained children. The water of the great basin hypnotizes her. . . . Water: alluring: ah! . . . a fair clean sheet of water over one in tender complicity and no one the wiser. . . . But there are too many eyes here: no, not now.

The *rue Racine*, her mother's door. . . . Five minutes, a half hour, how long who knows, who knows? . . . an infinite void of time, hesitating, here she stands, her hand on the bell. Go in? Well. And then — what? Tell her? . . . what? Selfish, mildewed old lady, snug in her corner: how could she understand this suffering, beyond sense? how could Madame Larive ever feel despair? . . . And she goes on. . . .

In the crowded popular quarters, people jostle her, crush her, force her to turn back. She pushes on, knowing that at the end of those streets lies the river, the great wide river, deep, mighty, wel-

Oriente

coming, hidden by parapets. And here it is, under enormous buttresses, green, slimy, horrible, alluring. . . . How many have found there the only solution for problems too hard for weak human heads to solve! She stands looking at it, motionless, with haggard eyes fixed on a little eddy in the current. Strange! That little eddy is like something feverishly alive. It struggles so hard to keep its place, not to be swept away; it seems to be mounting the stream. The whole might of the waters runs athwart it, breaking it, sweeping it on and away to the sea. But it struggles. It builds a little cask of smooth, soft water, so soft, so soft. . . . Good to be whirling there: all would soon be over! . . . She crouches on her elbows, hoists herself up. . . . An old bookseller comes up behind her:

“Hey, there! Young lady! Careful, careful! . . .”

He puts out his hand to hold her, to — touch

Collapse

her. At the feel of that coarse, wrinkled hand, Thérèse contracts. She slips away, frantic with fear.

The bridge, more streets, and in the Tuileries other basins, basins for boys and girls, with just enough water to keep the keels of their toy boats afloat. Statues of naked women, immortal, pearl-colored. . . . Streets, inimical crowds that hurry toward her, stampede her, as if she were an obstacle in their path. She steps aside, shrinks, glides on. Streets, avenues, boulevards, insistently, indefinitely, as in Hell aeons of torments succeed those undergone. And the fiendish vehicles lunge at you, whining, grinding, like headless monsters!

She stands for ten minutes on a traffic island, too weak to complete the crossing. A courteous old gentleman offers her his arm and escorts her across; then, seeing her so uncertain, he insists on her going with him to a pharmacy, where he

Orientale

buys her a headache powder. She accepts, swallows the powder, and starts out again. . . .

Other streets. Really, Paris is endless! . . . Thérèse is sure that if ever she came to the end of it she would find a great ditch, into which her last step would plunge her, and all would be over. . . . But she will never reach it. She must have been going around and around. And it is no use asking the way to it: no one would tell her. People want to forget such things. There would always be someone . . . like the old bookseller. . . .

She walks on and on . . . hugging a street now, lined with shops, many shops. . . . The sidewalk is narrow, and it is thronged with a busy, noisy, aimless crowd, thrusting and jostling in contradictory directions up and down the thin lane between the street and the shop-stands which clutter the pavement. . . . A big man is heading straight for her: he fills the whole passageway. No thought for others. He will

Collapse

strike her, if they meet. With an instinctive recoil Thérèse backs into a shop. . . .

A crude light, revealing heaps and rows of groceries, fruits, vegetables, dazzles her. She blinks and turns to leave, when a voice halts her:

“Why, if it isn’t Madame Beauchamps! So you’re back, are you? That’s a surprise! . . . Three months it’s been, hasn’t it? . . . It’s nice to see you again. Sit down, sit down.”

Thérèse sinks into a chair. She makes a super-human effort to understand.

“Well, and how was your trip, Madame Beauchamps? It wasn’t what you might call a pleasure trip. I know: family affairs never are. All the same, you look well. A little palish; but that’s from travelling, it’ll pass. I knew you were coming home to-day, Monsieur Beauchamps told Mademoiselle Lise. I knew you were coming home, but I didn’t think you’d look in on your grocer the first thing. . . . That is nice of you. . . . I know what you want, don’t you bother.

Orientale

Madame Beauchamps was saying: 'Now I am coming home, I want a surprise for Monsieur Beauchamps. A small pineapple and a box of caramels for dessert.' . . . You see, I know what you fancy."

Thérèse nodded, beaten.

"There now! Didn't I know?" said the woman, triumphantly. "Jules, a small pineapple for Madame, three francs seventy-five, and a box of our best caramels."

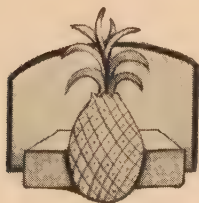
And when the package was done up, she slipped it herself between her customer's nerveless fingers; and, at that touch, they contracted slightly.

Five minutes later, Madame Beauchamps was ringing her own door-bell.

"Ah!" cried Eugène, as he opened the door, with an effusion of joy," I knew it! I knew you would come. . . . Oh, let me kiss you! I am so happy! . . . You see, nothing is changed. The

Collapse

table is laid. . . . What have you brought? . . .
A surprise. . . . For me? . . . Oh, how nice of
you! May I open it? . . . Pineapple, a pine-
apple! Caramels! . . . You see? You can't for-
get . . . just what I like. . . . You see? You
see? You *had* to come back! ”



VIII

Readjustments

NEVER could she have believed, when she complained of life formerly, that it would one day prove so sickening. Compared to her present existence, her old one seemed, however little enviable, infinitely more acceptable, more livable. The very fact of supporting it impatiently was in itself a kind of relief, dim though it might be, and had a little of the archangelic beauty of revolt. But resignation, unjustified by a philosophic view of life, is of all things the most sterile and bitter.

Of such resignation, barren and bestial, the poor woman now felt the degrading yoke. The spring that had nerved her will and courage for almost two years had suddenly snapped, and her whole being had collapsed. She no longer felt

Readjustments

resentment against anyone or anything. She was vegetating, not living.

The surprises which her husband had contrived for her return and with which he felt that he had somehow bought it brought a pale and vacant smile to her lips, the smile of a convalescent bidden, with seductive smirks, to partake of a tasteless *tisane* in a flowered bowl.

Poor little baits, touching ones: they represented so many ingenious sacrifices on his part, so many difficult dovetailings of tutorings on the side, so many hours of work added to his already over-full days.

It was true that he had had a section of the wall in her bed-room taken out and the little window transformed into a large bay one; but what he had not found time to tell her, on the evening of their interview, and what constituted the real surprise, was that in this bay, framed and hung with beautiful white curtains, stood a new pink *chaise longue*, studded with three sym-

Orientale

metrical cushions, a couch for a lady of leisure to spend her long, long afternoons on in aimless dreams.

But this bay window gave on the court. The view must be taken strictly for granted and the deceptive *tulle* of the curtains never ruffled. And, lying on that couch, what novel could she read as brilliantly begun and as wretchedly ended as her own romance? It had all come too late.

Monsieur Beauchamps, in vein of vanity, had gone so far as to order of the tailor a suit in the latest fashion. He slipped it on as soon as he came home and stowed away his school skin. And he kept on his shoes lest a shift to slippers seem too untidy. He made a point of expressing himself elegantly, but in his simple and rather somnolent goodness he never found anything clever to say. It was as if he had borrowed another man's clothes, so constrained, small and graceless were his gestures.

Readjustments

Thérèse had neither the strength to smile nor the cruelty to chafe at these little absurdities. But she found no satisfaction in this evident determination to change. All these things were too remote now: they concerned her no longer. What she felt for Eugène was a kind of sisterly compassion, as if she had seen him awkwardly making love to another woman.

If any one thing could have touched her heart through the triple layer of indifference and discouragement that enveloped it, it was the dismissal of Georges. And maybe, in fact, she felt, dimly, some comfort in it.

Monsieur Beauchamps, roused at last against the original sin in his household and the sole cause of his misfortunes, had put the boy in boarding school. This step had necessitated further sacrifices, but he really could not stand the sight of that little busybody, whose malice had horrified him. Had he not followed his step-mother like a sleuth, day after day for a week,

Orientale

until he was sure of everything, and had he not then led his father one evening to the house, where, as they stood hidden, they saw her slip out, casual and furtive? Ah, what memories!

But what most disgusted the poor school-teacher was that immense, deep, incomprehensible hatred, that senile hatred in the heart of a green boy.

But Monsieur Beauchamps, for all his thoughtfulness, could not quite take his wife's place, and Thérèse had to resume the direction, momentarily disordered, of her home. It was like the slow flooding of a muddy, irresistible tide. In the first place there was Lise with her everlasting expense book, trying bolder subterfuges on her convalescing mistress. Thérèse gave battle, automatically, and also to save Eugène an excess of work. But that was not enough. In the joy of the first days he had decreed that the meals be more copious and savory, and now they had to be cut down. From every corner of the flat

Readjustments

tumbled an array of objects, clothes, linen and knick-knacks, cracked, worn and broken, all crying for repair. The *chaise longue* waited ironically for a mistress too busy to spend an hour on it.

Besides, she was not at all sure that the distraction of all this activity was not preferable to that repose. Lying on that couch, too weary and too preoccupied to read a book, she was a prey to her thoughts. One always expelled the others: her lover's desertion. She could not understand it. She would never understand it.

Why had the man gone? What had she done to him? There had never been a shadow between them. Courteous, discreet, and so tender! he had never raised his voice. Yes, his tenderness was a little ceremonious, but she did not mind that. On the contrary, it had seemed to her a refinement the more, a further charm.

What, what had happened to him? Why had

Orientale

he not spoken at least? What sudden and cruel contempt! He had not been afraid of Monsieur Beauchamps, since he had stayed quietly in Paris for three months after the break and she had met him in all security, whenever she wished. He seemed so far above provocation, so sure of himself, so impassive!

Had he stopped loving her? Nothing in his conduct gave the slightest hint of it. Always attentive, deferential, and also impassioned at times, as on that first day.

What then? . . .

Was it his race? Was that the explanation of these disconcerting manners? Was it true that these Orientals are all smooth, inconceivable and perfidious? . . . like Monsieur Tchéou, who had left her in the throes of love and had never sent her so much as a line.

Her lover's disappearance shocked and hurt her like an insult. To disappear like that, without a word, with his secret in the hands of a *con-*

Readjustments

cièrge! . . . to slip away, like a thief, to shirk explanation! . . . ah! and to go forever! Forever! What an abyss in that sinister word! Forever! . . . You are walking in a field of anemones, in spring-time, under the early morning sun, and suddenly . . . the ground gives under you . . . you fall into a pit and, instead of striking bottom at once, you feel yourself slowly sinking in a sticky, heavy atmosphere, unendingly. . . .

Thérèse now knew the horror of regret, so drab her present pain, her yesterday's sorrow so slightly more colored. . . . Little by little, to her horror, the features of the man she had loved began to fade. They were confused now with those of Monsieur Tchéou, whom she had loved also, and by and bye only his remained, and it was him she regretted—her first love, her pure and tremulous dawn and her magnificent hope.

And life went on. . . .

Orientale

One day Eugène spoke to his wife, with constraint and hesitation, of his pecuniary difficulties. He was played out. He had tried everything, but the rate for tutoring was growing lower every day, and for one pupil that he picked up he lost another or often two. Soon he would be reduced to his bare salary. He had believed, for one rash moment, that his increased expenses would produce, by some magical indulgence of Destiny, the means to meet them with. . . .

Thérèse understood. She replied simply and directly:

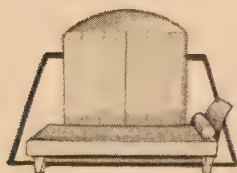
“Well, we must do it then. . . . Georges need not live away from home.”

And, the following week, she laid eyes once more on the sallow and vicious face of her tormentor, she endured again his odious presence, his stupid jokes, and felt the influx of his hatred. . . .

But what did his hatred matter now? It danced

Readjustments

before her like a bodiless shade, a gibbering and hostile shade, but spineless, remote, completely inoffensive, though still a little repulsive, when, for instance, suddenly raising its voice, it seemed to rush toward her, ugly . . . so ugly! . . .



IX

The Letter

AND now the weeks passed, and the months. Her soul was like a poor parlor, where no one dare enter, for those who lived in it are dead: a slow, drab dust had settled on everything. She needed nothing there, she touched nothing, and she made no move to brush off the dust. Formerly the wind of revolt and recrimination swept and ventilated that atmosphere. Now all was sealed and closed, all was over. . . . She expected nothing now, she hoped for nothing.

One day, long after these events, more than a year after her return to the conjugal roof, on a long afternoon in late June, Thérèse received a strange visit.

She was alone, lying on her pink couch; Lise

The Letter

had gone out and neither Georges nor Eugène had come home yet. . . . The bell rang.

Annoyed, she rose, went to the door, and saw a vague form that bowed to her and said, in an odd voice, with an accent that she knew well:

“ Does Madame Beauchamps live here? May I speak to her alone? ”

“ Yes,” she replied, nonplussed, to both questions. . . . “ Come in, Monsieur, if you please. . . . It is so dark here.”

She led the visitor into the lightest room. He was a rather small, correct-looking man, at once youthful and wizened, with slit eyes in a yellow face and a ceremonious smile.

He bowed very low:

“ I knew I should find you alone at this hour.”

Thérèse started. Always these Oriental precautions! What new danger was threatening? ”

“ I have a letter for you,” he continued. “ The

Orientale

writer insisted that I deliver it into your own hands. Here it is."

He drew from his pocket a sealed envelope, handed it to her and disappeared, so lightly and silently that it was as if he had never been there at all.

Thérèse turned to look for him. . . . Then she shrugged her shoulders, as if she gave up all hope of ever understanding the ways of that furtive race. . . . And at last she broke the seal and read the letter.

The light was waning, and she moved toward the window, slowly, uncertainly . . . like a ghost. . . .

"*Madame Thérèse,*

I am writing you to-day for the last time. I dare not hope this letter will touch you, none of my previous ones have done so. Nevertheless, I am writing. It would be too cruel not to say good-bye to you.

The Letter

Monsieur Lung has left on business for another province. He is no longer in Paris to deliver you my letters, as he used to do. I am entrusting this one to my ingenious young friend, Monsieur Sin, who is an *attaché* of our legation in France. He



will find a way of delivering it to you, no matter what the obstacles. He will not wait for the answer.

I do not reproach you, Madame Thérèse. A woman's heart is like snow. In the morning you open the window, and everything is white and shining with light; and hope springs in your

Orientale

heart. But when night comes, it has all melted away. Oblivion is a terrible sun.

I do not reproach you. I should never have left. If I had stayed, I think you would not have dropped me so easily. But I wanted too much, I wanted to be free to offer you my whole life. I loved you too well. And now all is over.

The first months, I still hoped, I said to myself: she will answer, she will give me some sign of life, and no matter how faint I will understand it, despite the distance between us — half of the world. But you gave none. I wrote to Monsieur Lung to find out: he replied that you had forgotten me, that you had no intention of leaving your husband or your European life, that you had dreamed a dream and that now you had waked from it.

I understood everything then, both what you hid from me and what you had not the courage to tell me. You should have been brave, you

The Letter

should have told me, Madame Thérèse, that you could not love a Chinaman, a man so different, so distasteful to you! . . . I understand. I understand so well that you could not love me. But I wish I had not had to wait so long, to suffer so long!

Now I have made up my mind. I have gone back to my old life. My wife, whom I had repudiated, has returned. I have let her stay: there is no reason to put her away. She cannot make me suffer any longer: I am indifferent.

Do you know what a man of money is like? He is like a silk worm. He spins himself a brilliant cocoon and hides in it. But sometimes he dies in it. That will be my life from now on.

Before I shut myself up forever in the narrow and dark cocoon of Wisdom, I bid you farewell, Madame Thérèse, a last farewell. . . .

I loved you so dearly!

I never loved anyone before you or since.

Orientale

You greeted my arrival on foreign soil and bent down and spoke to me. You were so beautiful, Madame Thérèse. I have never seen anything lovelier, rarer, or more moving. I wanted to carry you off to my country, as one steals a statue of gold, in a temple, to hide it in one's house.

I thought of you as a fairy, as an idol. And yet you were a woman also, you told me. . . .”

Her eyes swam, she could hardly read. She was against the window-pane now. With a feverish gesture she tore away the curtain that drank up the last light of day:

“ . . . you told me that you were willing I should love you and take you away; and you let me go home, deigning to accept my promise that I would return.

Alas!

Good-bye, Madame Thérèse. It is over. This is the last time I shall speak in French. But I can

The Letter

not tear from my heart the memories that live there: our meetings, our drives in the lacquered car, the carnations, and that last evening, when I kissed your shoulder. . . .

Good-bye."



4-5

